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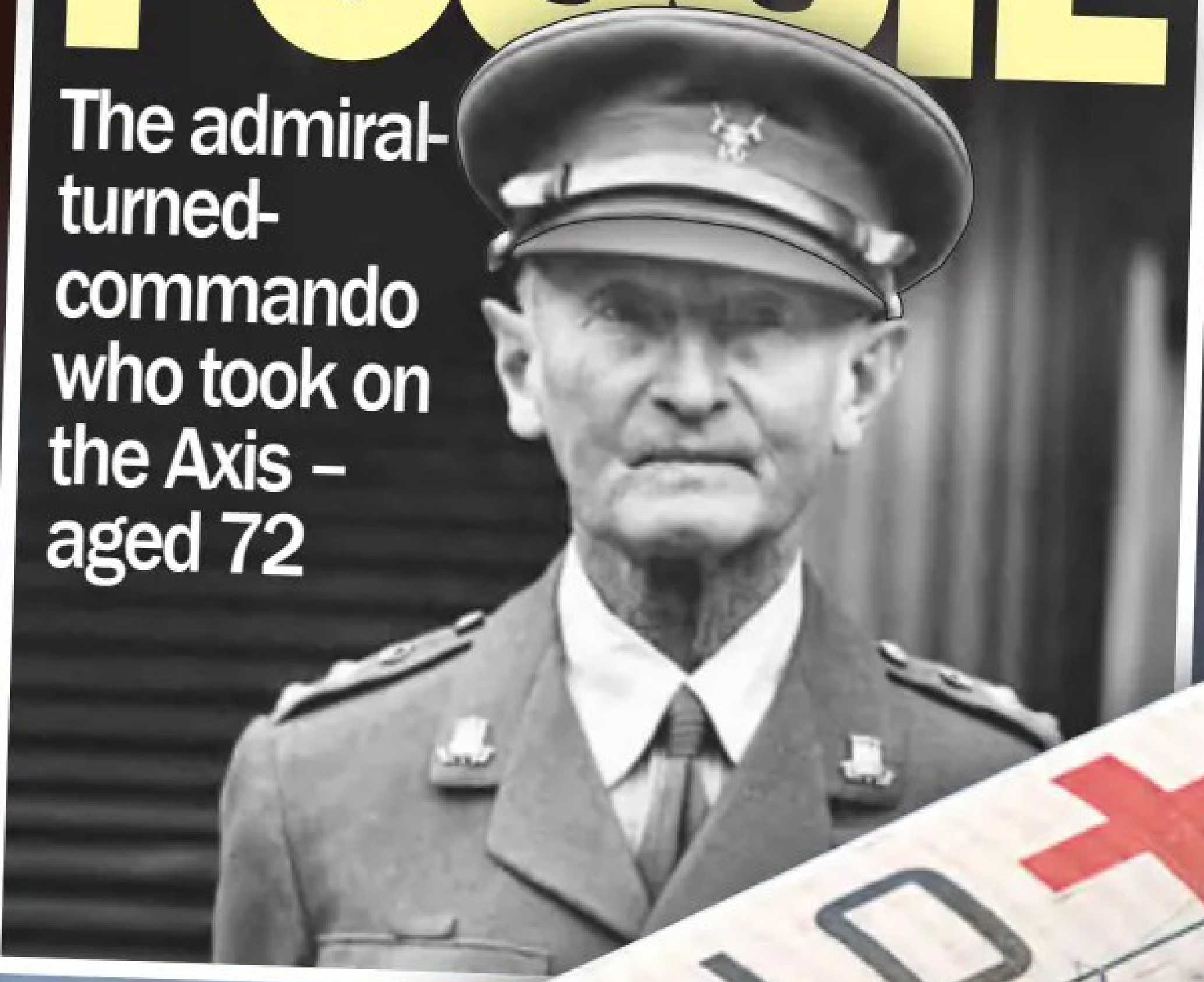
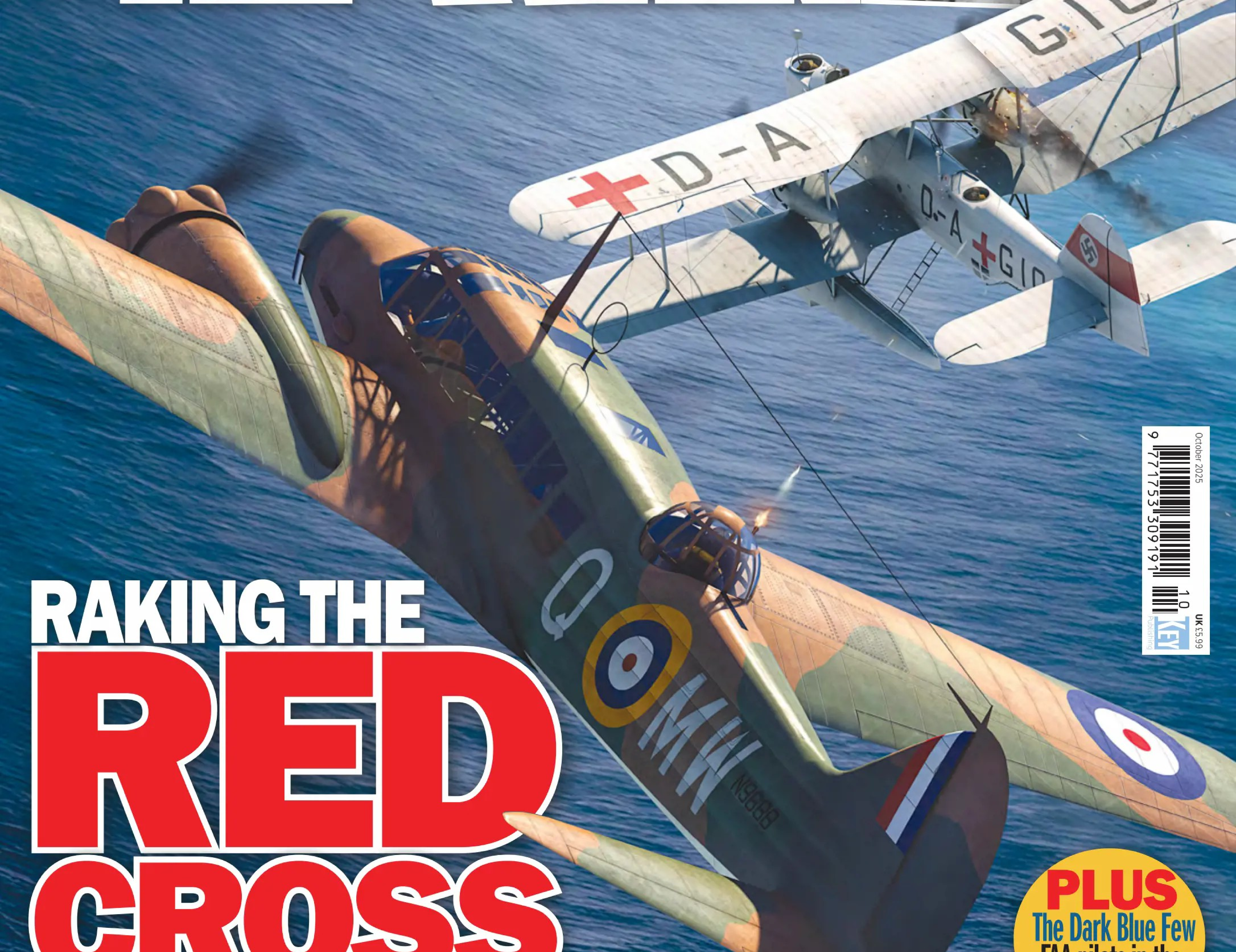
BRITAIN AT WAR

ISSUE
222

THE FIGHTING FOSSIL



The admiral-turned-commando who took on the Axis – aged 72



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RAKING THE RED CROSS

Battle of Britain controversy: why did the RAF down Seenotflugkommando floatplanes?

PLUS
The Dark Blue Few
FAA pilots in the aerial struggle

FIGHTER FACE-OFF

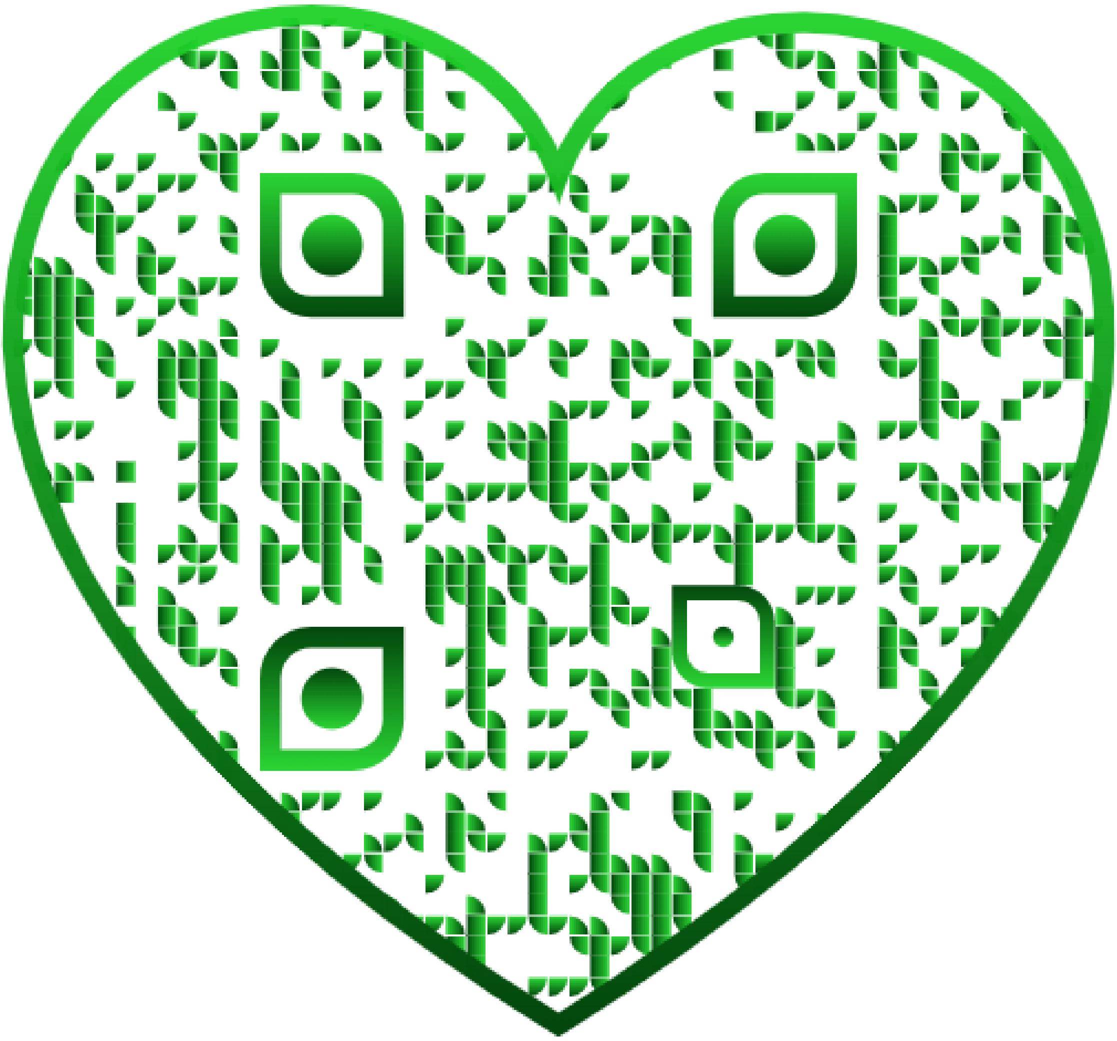
Vickers vs Fokker in 1915 'scourge'

CONKS' HERO

Saving the submarine that sank the *Belgrano*

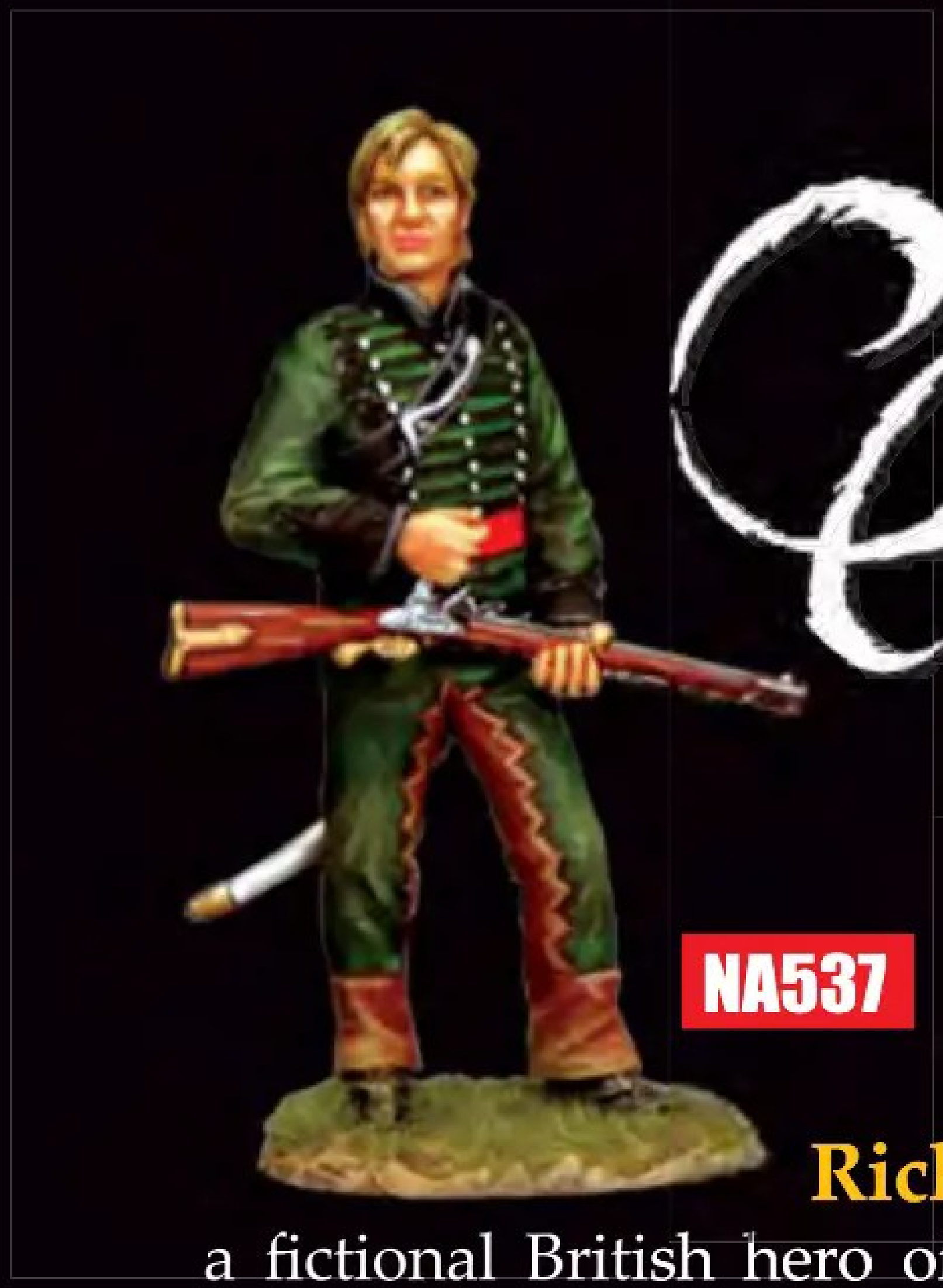
CASTLES ON THE SAND

How Britain's piers were marshalled for the war effort



KING & COUNTRY

Sharpe's 95th Rifles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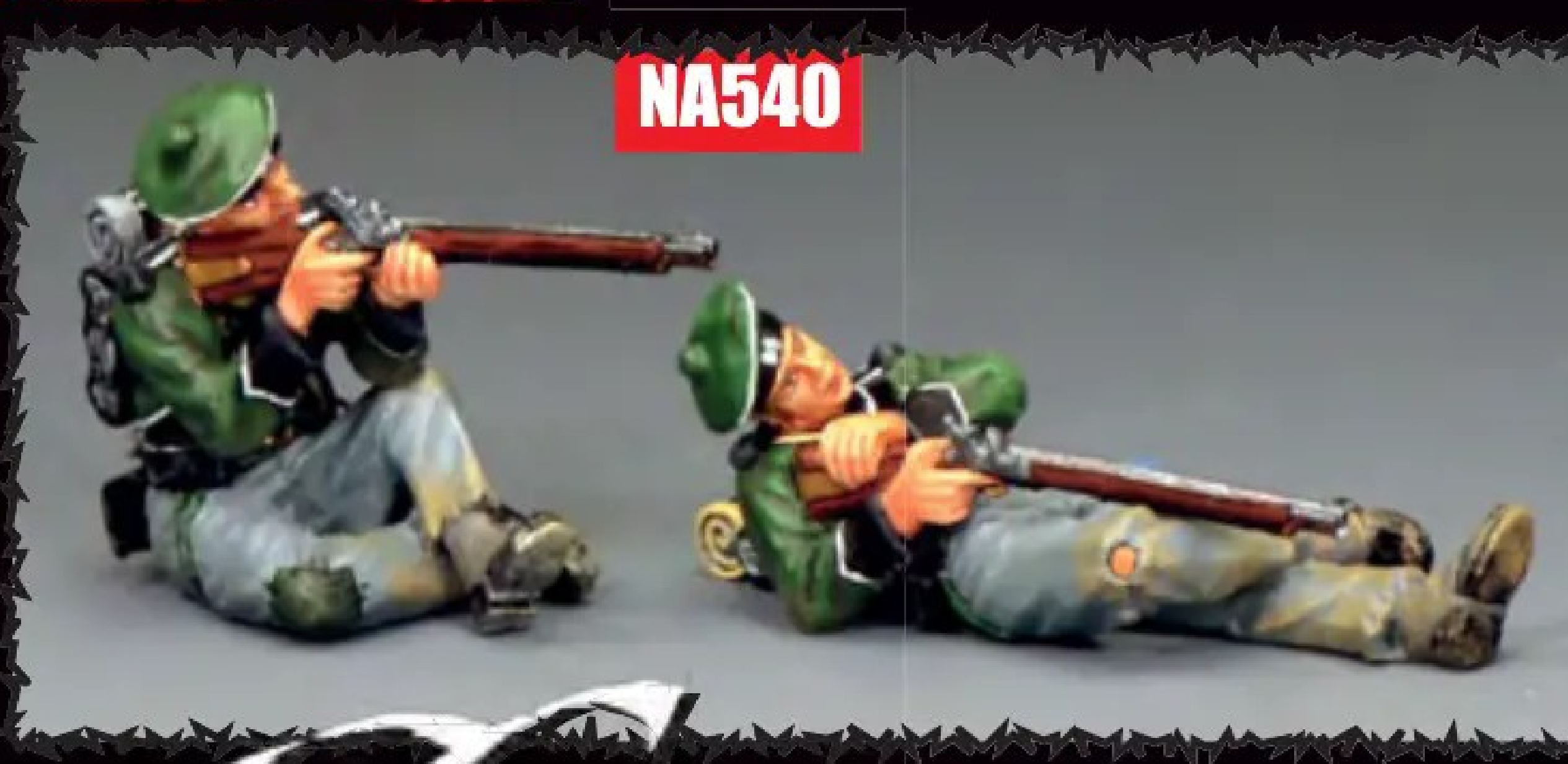
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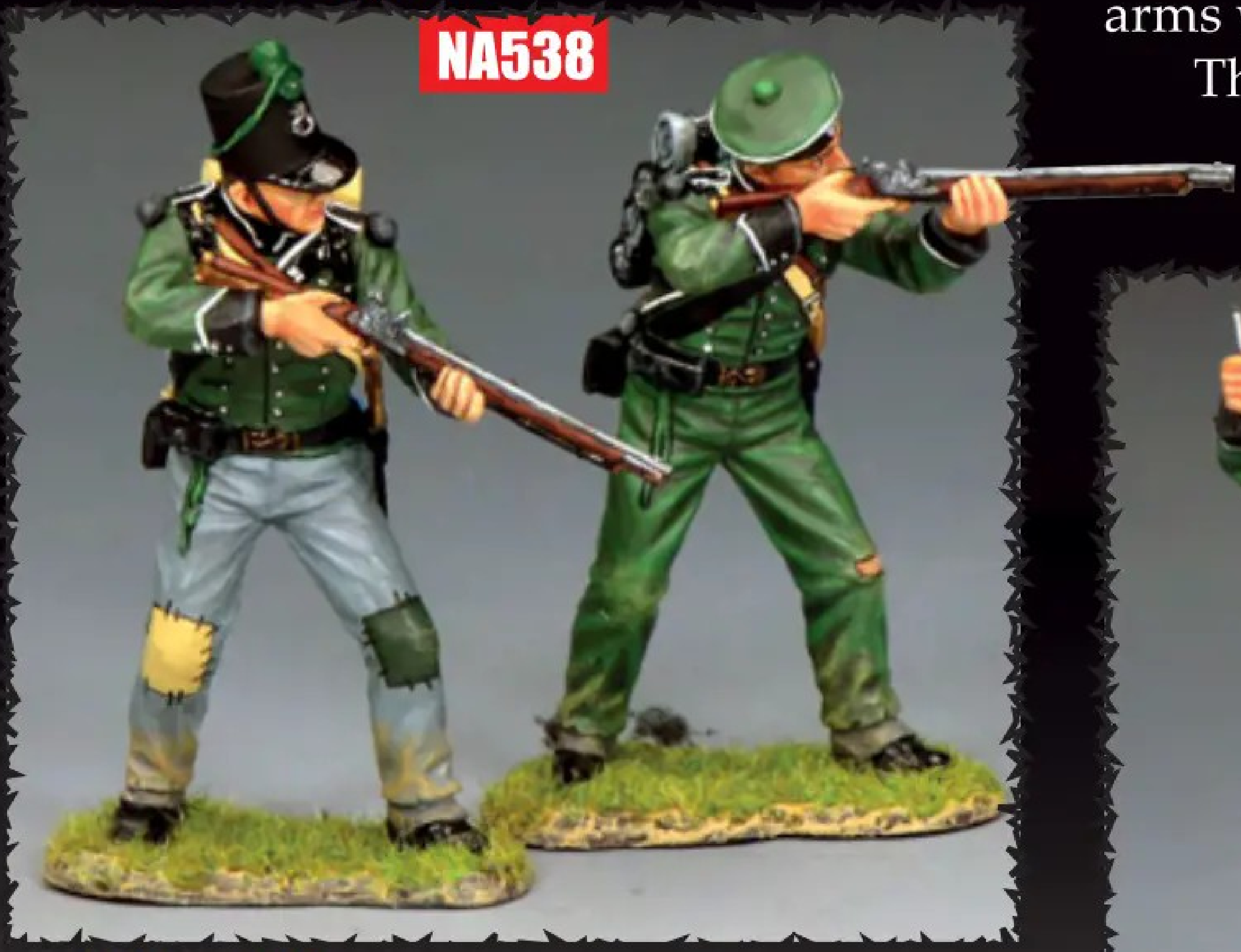
Richard Sharpe is a fictional British hero of the Napoleonic Wars created by celebrated author *Bernard Cornwell*. Sharpe's adventures and progress in the British Army are recorded in a long and very popular collection of novels and short stories that were later adapted and formed the basis for an equally successful television series.

In many of the *'Sharpe'* novels and television versions the British regiment portrayed was a highly unique unit originally known as *'The Experimental Corps of Riflemen'* later to become…

The 95th Rifles.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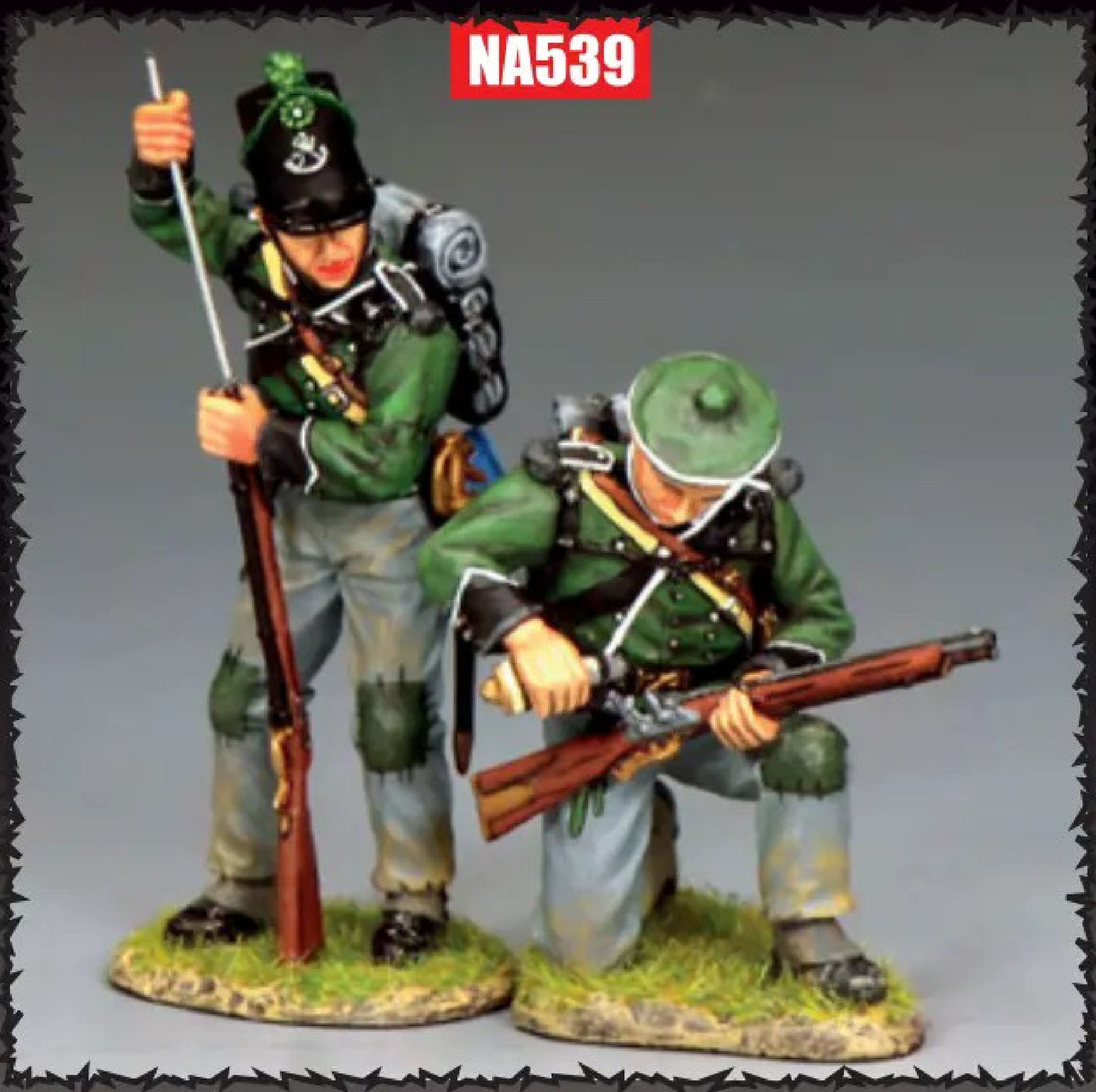
Richard Sharpe, who had risen from the ranks to become an officer would join this new regiment during *The Peninsular War* which was fought in Spain and Portugal between *1808* and *1814*.

As the original *'Rifle Regiment'* officers and men wore uniforms with dark green tunics and trousers together with black belts and other equipment. Their principal weapon was the *Baker Rifle*… a superbly designed rifle that was both robust and much more accurate than the standard British musket of the time, *'The Brown Bess'*.

Among the many other advantages the *95th* enjoyed was their independent skirmishing tactics allowing for more rapid movement across the battlefield backed up by expert knowledge and skill in fieldcraft and marksmanship.

From the *Peninsular War* to *Waterloo* their reputation for reliability and skill at arms was second-to-none!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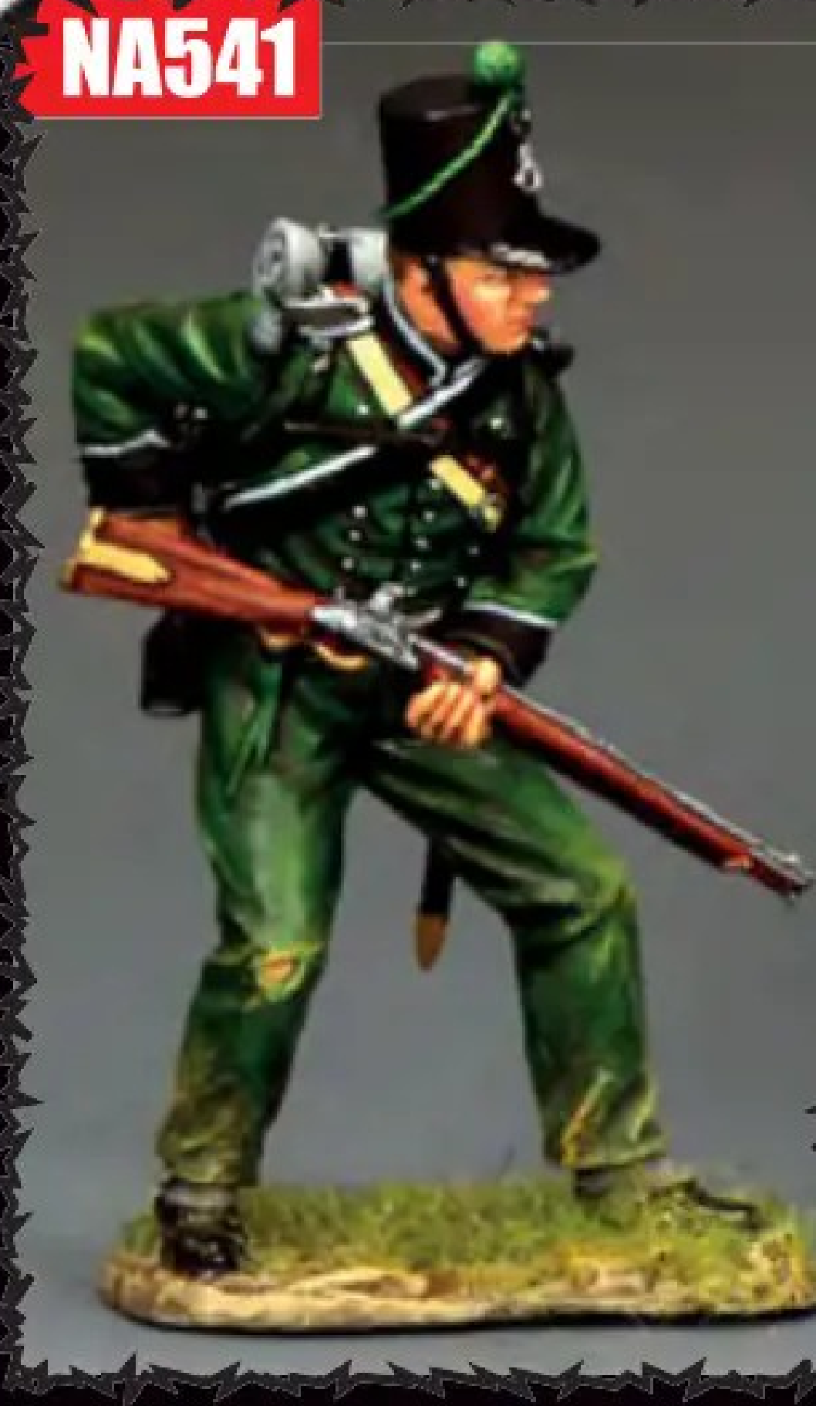
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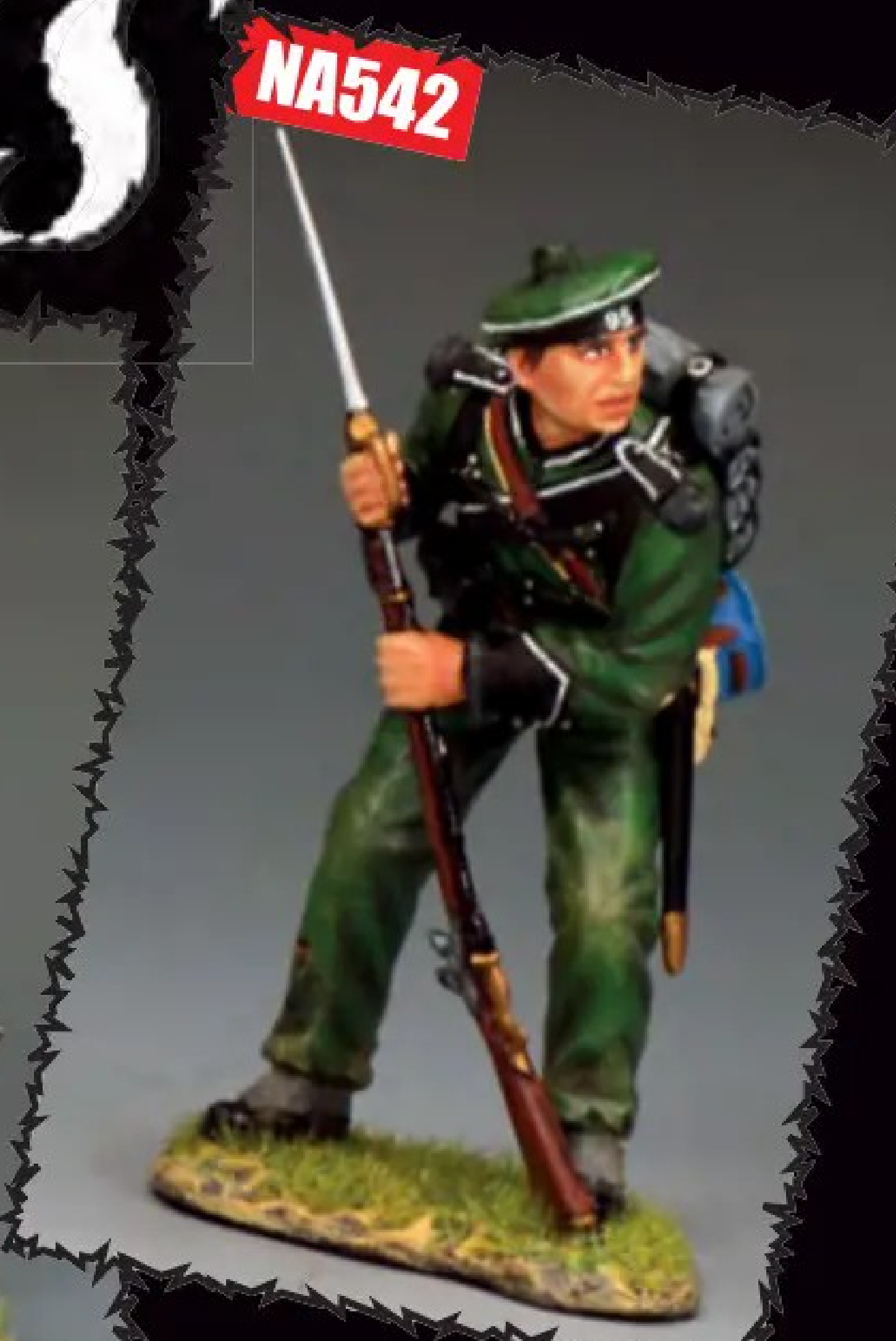
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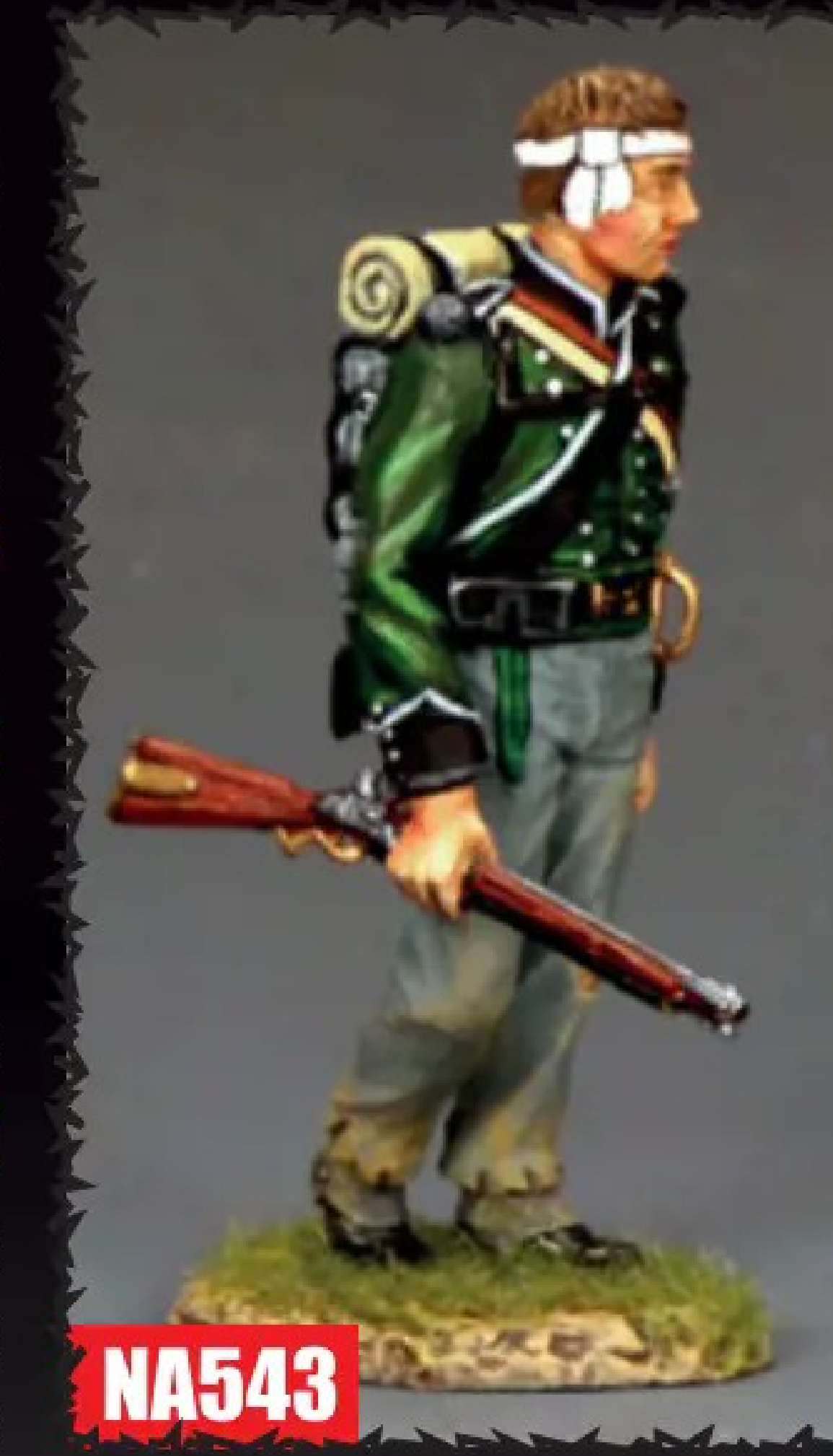
This first release of *10 all-new riflemen* in their dark green and dusty, well-worn uniforms are featured as they would have looked and fought in the rough and rugged landscape of the *Iberian Peninsula* during those years between *1808* and *1814*. A second batch of *10 additional riflemen* will be released in the coming months.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If you enjoyed the heroic adventures of *Richard Sharpe* and admired the men of the *95th Rifles* *you have come to the right place…*

KING & COUNTRY

AUTHENTIC HAND-MADE HISTORY

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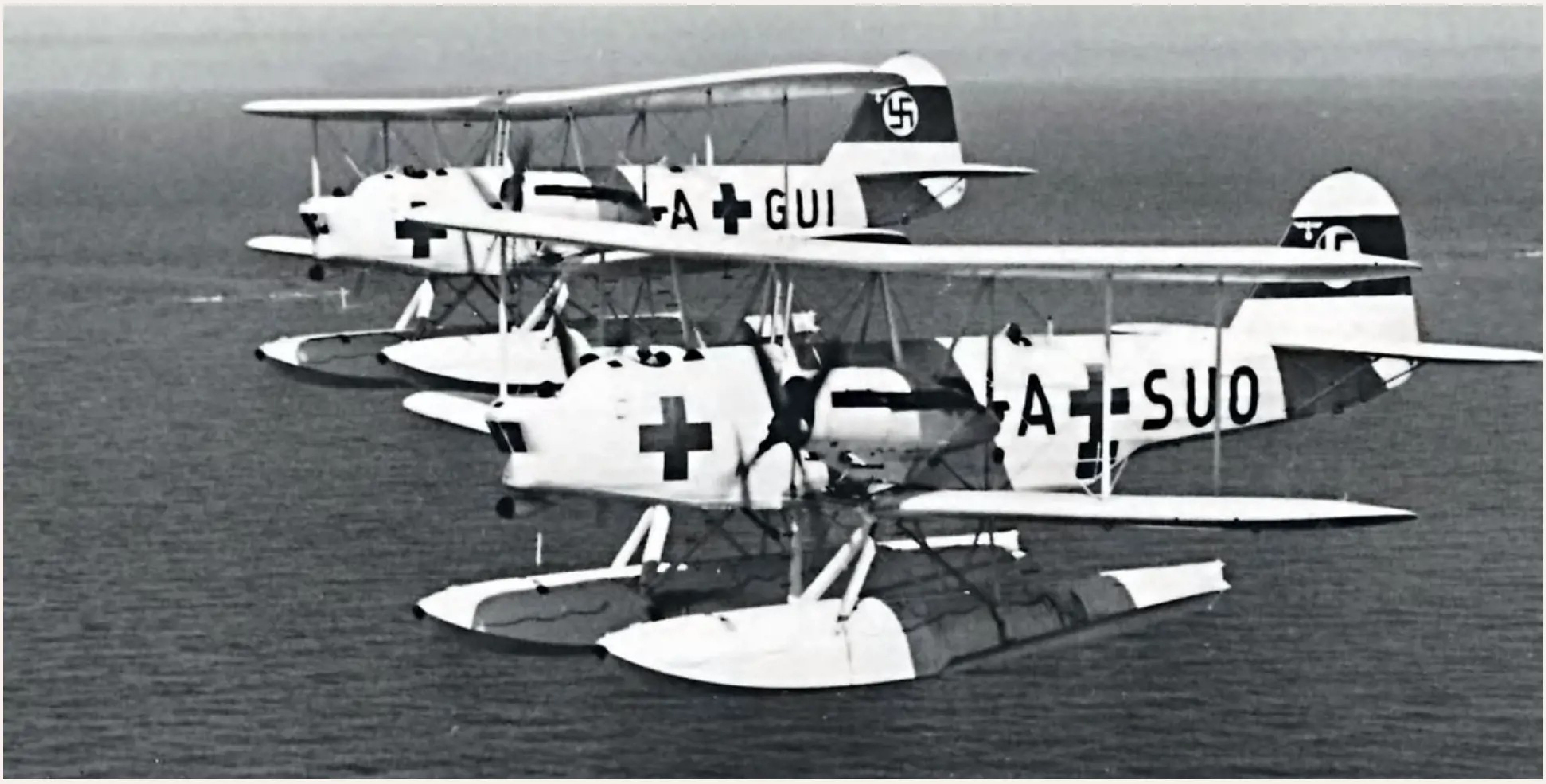
From the Editor

During the Battle of Britain, German air-sea rescue floatplanes – including these Heinkel He 59s of SeenotflugKdo 3 – were at the centre of a controversial military decision VIA JOHN WEAL



I'd like to start with a few words about Flight Lieutenant John Cruickshank VC. In World War Two, 181 men received 182 VCs and John was the last surviving member of this elite group, so his passing marks the end of an era. The oldest VC recipient is now Keith Payne, a 91-year-old Queenslander who earned his honour in Vietnam in May 1969. Cruickshank was the last member of the RAF to earn the prestigious award, a feat not repeated in Korea, Suez or the Falklands. Never say never, but in a world increasingly dominated by unmanned technologies it seems unlikely the opportunity for RAF aircrews to earn a VC will arise again.

In 2020, we were fortunate enough to interview John. To mark his passing, we have republished five extracts on our Facebook page, so please check that out. In the meantime, the day will also come where we lose all our wartime veterans, so if you have a story to share, please reach out.

It is Battle of Britain season once more. The interest in this aerial struggle persists, but I won't deny editorial fatigue when it comes to commissioning articles covering the well-trodden battle. Thus, I was determined to find something a little different this time. Andrew Thomas dives into one of the battle's big controversies: the officially sanctioned shooting down of German air-sea rescue aircraft. While the Luftwaffe floatplanes ostensibly served a humanitarian function, suspicion of a covert martial objective was rife, leading to the decision to invalidate the protections afforded to them. Andrew examines the evidence, before delving into the detail of some of the most bizarre combats of that summer.

From one aerial struggle to another… Peter Hart and Gary Bain turn to the so-called 'Fokker Scourge' of 1915, so-called, because, as they suggest, the impact of Germany's first dedicated fighters was more limited than popularly imagined. Fokkers were too few in numbers and the Royal Flying Corps' determination too strong, with Britain's fighter pilots doing their best in harum-scarum dogfights told here through thrilling firsthand accounts.

Then, Gerry van Tonder crosses the veldt with the 7th Hussars, relating events as told by the diary of one of the unit's officers. It is a tale of battle between a tribal chief and a British colonel that ended in execution. What's more, the man pulling the strings was the founder of the Boy Scouts, Sir Robert Baden-Powell.

I welcome Australian author Dr Joseph Brennan in his debut *BAW* feature, a wistful and fascinating 'tour' of Britain's seaside piers, exploring their roles during World War Two. The number of the UK's piers today is around half of the Victorian/Edwardian peak and war casualties have something to do with that, as Joseph reveals.

Allan George profiles the remarkable career of a sailor who came of age in the Victorian Navy and commanded a battlecruiser at Jutland. This perhaps seems similar to most the Royal Navy's World War One officers, but there is a twist in this tale. By World War Two, many ageing admirals were content with retirement, joining the Home Guard or otherwise making themselves useful, but Sir Walter Cowan went further to become Britain's oldest commando!

Last, in the early weeks of World War One, the British acquired the 'windfall' battleships – export battleships being built on British slipways. One of them was HMS *Agincourt*, a ship known for her sheer number of heavy guns – more than any dreadnought before or since. I profile a mighty ship never intended for British service but that instead never saw the shores of her original buyer.

John Ash, Editor

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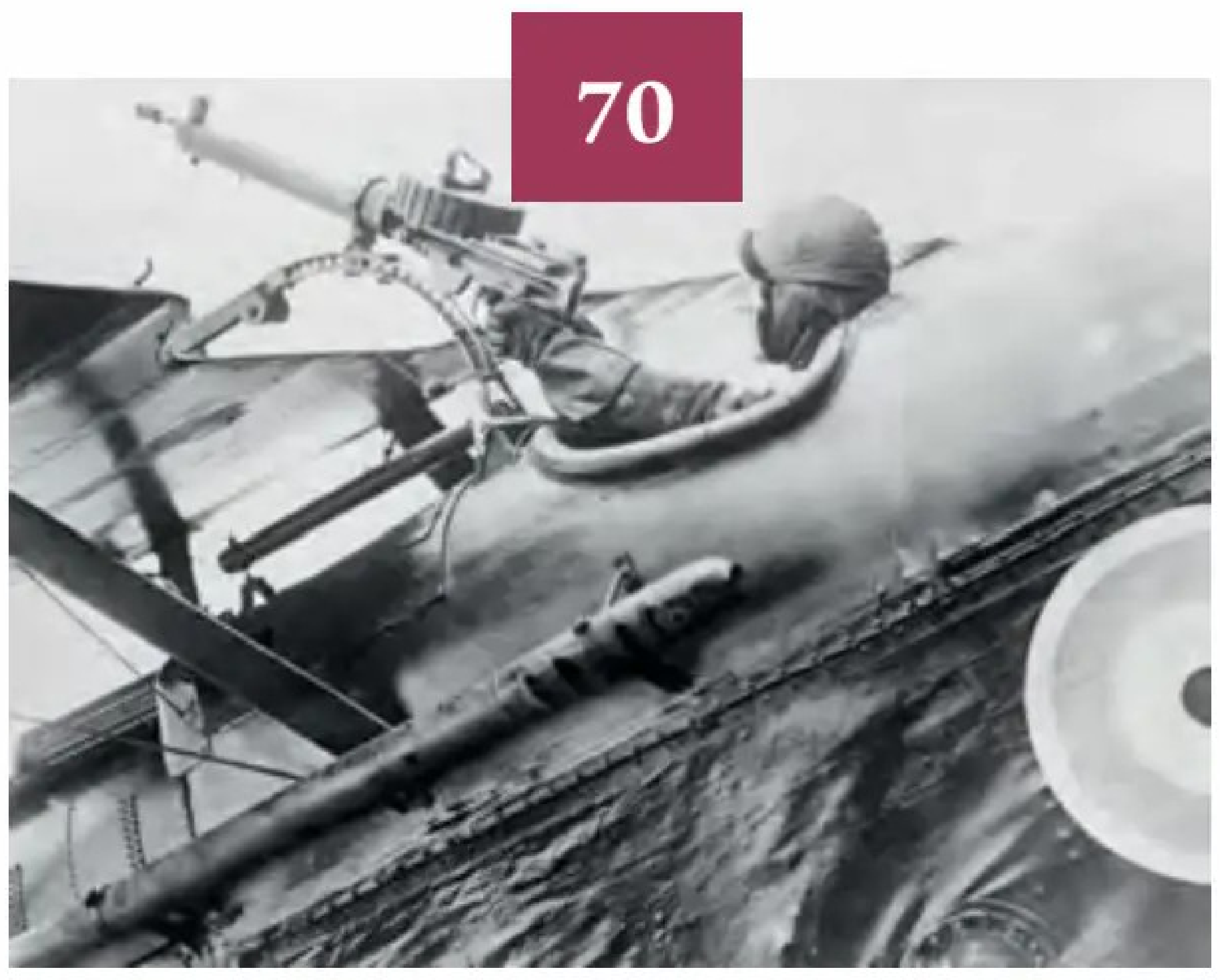

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Duncan Evans is your guide on must-have militaria collectables from the auction houses and dealers. This month, he focuses on the Eastern Front in World War Two

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THE LAST AIR VC: 1920-2025

Sean Feast pays tribute to Flight Lieutenant John Cruickshank, the last survivor of the 181 men to receive the Victoria Cross during World War Two

John Cruickshank, who has died aged 105, was the last of a generation of 32 airmen and 181 heroes of all services to be awarded the Victoria Cross in World War Two. He was one of only four men in Coastal Command to receive the award and the only one not to do so posthumously – but it was a close-run thing.

Born John Alexander Cruickshank in Aberdeenshire on May 20, 1920, John looked set for a career in banking before the war interrupted his plans. He served first with the Royal Artillery, having joined the regiment as a territorial in May 1939, but he didn't transfer to the RAF until June 30, 1941.

John underwent flying training in the US and Canada, before returning home having been commissioned as a pilot officer in the RAFVR. Earmarked for Coastal Command, John completed his operational training at 4 (Coastal) OTU at Invergordon in the Scottish Highlands. As a qualified pilot he joined 210 Squadron, equipped with the US-built Catalina, on March 25, 1943. By the following summer, and now a flight lieutenant, John had completed more than 40 operational missions and seen little excitement. All that changed on July 17, 1944.

Along with his second pilot, Flight Sergeant John 'Jack' Garnett, and an eight-man crew, John took off from RAF Sullom Voe in the Shetlands at 1345hrs for a patrol of the North Sea calculated to last at least 14 hours. Eight hours in – and once more with nothing to report – the crew began thinking of the long slog home. However, at 2145hrs, a blip on the radar suggested a surface vessel some 43 miles ahead. John decided to investigate and identified the contact as a submarine on the surface, doing around 14kts. A barrage of anti-aircraft fire confirmed its enemy status and John circled to attack.

On his first pass at 50ft, with his gunners blazing away at the U-boat's conning tower, the depth charges failed to release. Coming around for a second attack, with a shout of "Here we go again!", the Catalina was struck several times, one shell exploding inside and causing utter devastation. The navigator was killed instantly, one of the air gunners was hit in the head and the flight engineer was wounded in both legs.

John was also wounded in his legs and chest, but gave no indication of the severity of his injuries nor any pain, being determined to complete his attack. Down at 50ft once again, he personally released a stick of six depth charges in a perfect straddle, before pulling away. Though he couldn't see it at the time, he had dealt a fatal blow and the U-boat sank.

Now clear of the danger, the crew took stock. Flak had torn great chunks out of the aircraft, destroyed the radar and cut one of the main fuel lines. Holes were plugged using canvas engine covers and lifejackets, while Jack Garnett took over flying, recognising how badly his skipper had been injured. John fainted through blood loss and was lowered from his seat to a rest bunk, where one of the gunners did his best to render first aid. John drifted in and out of consciousness and attempted to return to his seat, but was gently restrained. During the long flight home he was in constant pain, but refused morphine in case he was needed.

It was still dark by the time they reached Sullom Voe and John asked to be helped forward to the cockpit to take command. He also insisted they continue to orbit until there was sufficient light to ensure a safe landing. This meant more hours passed before he thought it safe to bring in the Catalina, the surviving crew having jettisoned everything that wasn't bolted down to keep the flying boat aloft.

Between John and Jack, they managed to bring the aircraft onto the sea, whereupon it immediately began sinking. With the throttles wide open, John steered the Catalina right up onto a beach. A medical officer climbed on board and found John in such a state of collapse that he was obliged to give him an immediate blood transfusion before he could be moved. John was found to have 72 individual wounds.

On September 1, 1944, *The London Gazette* announced the award of the VC to John Cruickshank. The citation referred to his "determination, fortitude and devotion of duty in keeping with the highest traditions of the service." Jack Garnett received a DFM, the only other member of the crew to be decorated. Three weeks later, both men attended an investiture at Holyrood House to receive their awards from King George VI.

John never returned to operational flying. After recovering, he was posted to Coastal Command HQ at Northwood and eventually left the RAF to resume his international banking career.

He retired in 1985. A modest man, he was nonetheless proud of his decoration and served as vice chair of The Victoria Cross and George Cross Association.

John married Marion Beverley, a Canadian, in 1955. She died in 1985. When his good friend and fellow Scot Bill Reid VC died in 2001, John said: "When I go, I suppose I had better put the light out." With his passing, a light has been extinguished on a generation the like of which we may never see again.

Miss Pick Up

John Cruickshank VC reunited with a Catalina at RAF Leuchars in September 2013 JEFF MITCHELL/GETTY

A LEGACY TO REMEMBER

Like so many decorated war heroes, Flight Lieutenant John Cruickshank's bravery was matched by his humility, writes Lord Ashcroft

John Cruickshank felt uncomfortable discussing the awarding of his Victoria Cross and would never have dreamt of claiming he had been worthy of being described as "the bravest of the brave", as I like to call recipients of the VC. Over the decades, Cruickshank rarely talked about his wartime service, saying in 2008: "You don't get involved in that kind of thing thinking of any decorations or any recognition. It was regarded as duty."

In 2013, he was equally reticent to discuss his valour on July 17, 1944, stating: "It was just normal. We were trained to do the job and that was it. I wouldn't like to say I'm the only one who has an amazing story – there are plenty of other stories coming from that time."

What a man, what modesty.

For more than eight decades, John Cruickshank's name has been synonymous with duty, loyalty, sacrifice, decency, humility and, above all, courage. Now that the last VC recipient from World War Two has died, the world is a poorer place.

Given that his death marks the end of an era, it seems entirely appropriate that John Cruickshank passed away as the world was preparing to commemorate VJ Day 2025, the day that marked the 80th anniversary of the end of World War Two.

Today, the world is a dangerous place, with war and conflict aplenty. So it is more important than ever that we honour and cherish the valour of men like Flight Lieutenant John Cruickshank VC, who put his country, monarch, comrades and wider freedoms above his personal safety to make the world a better place.

Ageing Warrior could become uncrewed asset

Britain envisages a new role for its Cold War IFVs GRAEME MAIN/MOD

An MOD tender seeks a contractor to convert FV510 Warrior infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs) into mine-breaching vehicles.

First entering service in 1987, Warrior was scheduled to be retired in 2025 following the cancellation of the Warrior Capability Sustainment Plan, but the last 359 vehicles have been granted a two-year extension to support the transition to successor platforms such as the modular Boxer 8x8 armoured vehicle, with the last Warriors now expected to leave British Army service by 2030.

However, Project Attila could result in a revival of the type as it seeks to convert six of the veteran IFVs into optionally crewed combat engineering vehicles to enhance operational mine clearance. The capability to rapidly remove mines and other obstacles from the battlefield prior to or during an initial offensive effort is deemed essential and is a prime developmental area.

It is understood that the six Warriors will lose their turrets and main armament and fitted with devices such as mine ploughs, rollers or a rocket-projected line charge MICLIC system such as the British Army's Python. The second phase of the project will be centred on using the converted vehicles to test autonomous capabilities and shaping requirements for future uncrewed ground vehicle acquisitions for the Army.

Should the £12,000,000 project be successful, it may open up further options for the ageing IFV. Warrior hulls, which are tracked and well-armoured, may also be suitable as uncrewed armoured ambulances given the increasing threat from drones to support vehicles on the modern battlefield. Theoretically, they could also become uncrewed/remote-controlled fire support or deep strike platforms through a variety of remote weapon or long-range missile system upgrades.

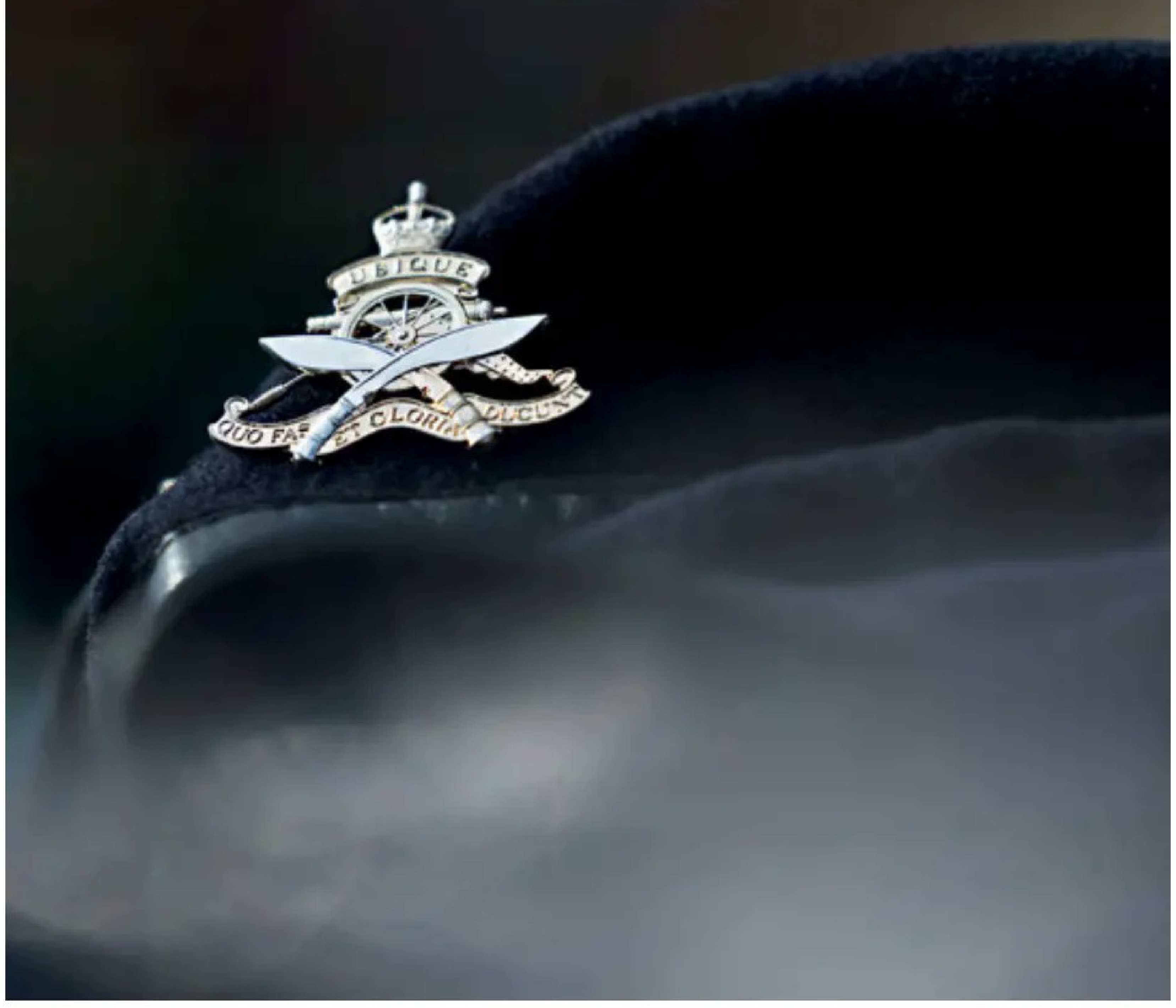
Blasts from the past slow firefighters

Fire crew, farmers and gamekeepers tackling a major moorland blaze in North Yorkshire close to the RAF Fylingdales radar base were hampered by unexploded ordnance. On August 11, 2025, a wildfire broke out on Langdale Moor and was declared a major incident two days later. Smoke was later detected 80 miles away in Skipton and crews and appliances from far afield were brought in to assist as the fire burned for two weeks until it was contained.

However, much of the blaze was on ground that was formerly a World War Two tank firing range. At least 18 explosions occurred as lingering shells detonated, while a British Army EOD team removed discovered ordnance on at least four occasions. County Chief Fire Officer Jonathan Dyson told the BBC: "As the peat continues to burn down it is finding the World War Two ordnance. We have now experienced more than 18 ordnance explosions within key areas".

Fortunately, although around ten square miles of moorland have been destroyed, there was no loss of life or damage to property.

King's Gurkha Artillery cap badge unveiled



The Army's newest regiment, the King's Gurkha Artillery, has unveiled its cap badge following approval from His Majesty The King. The badge pairs two of the army's most recognisable symbols: the crossed Kukris and the field gun of The Royal Artillery. It bears the mottos 'Ubique' (Everywhere) and 'Quo Fas et Gloria Ducunt' (Whither Right and Glory Lead). Lieutenant Colonel Michael Fletcher, King's Gurkha Artillery CO, said: "All of the officers and soldiers of the King's Gurkha Artillery are incredibly proud and honoured." SERGEANT ANDREW GRAYSON/MOD

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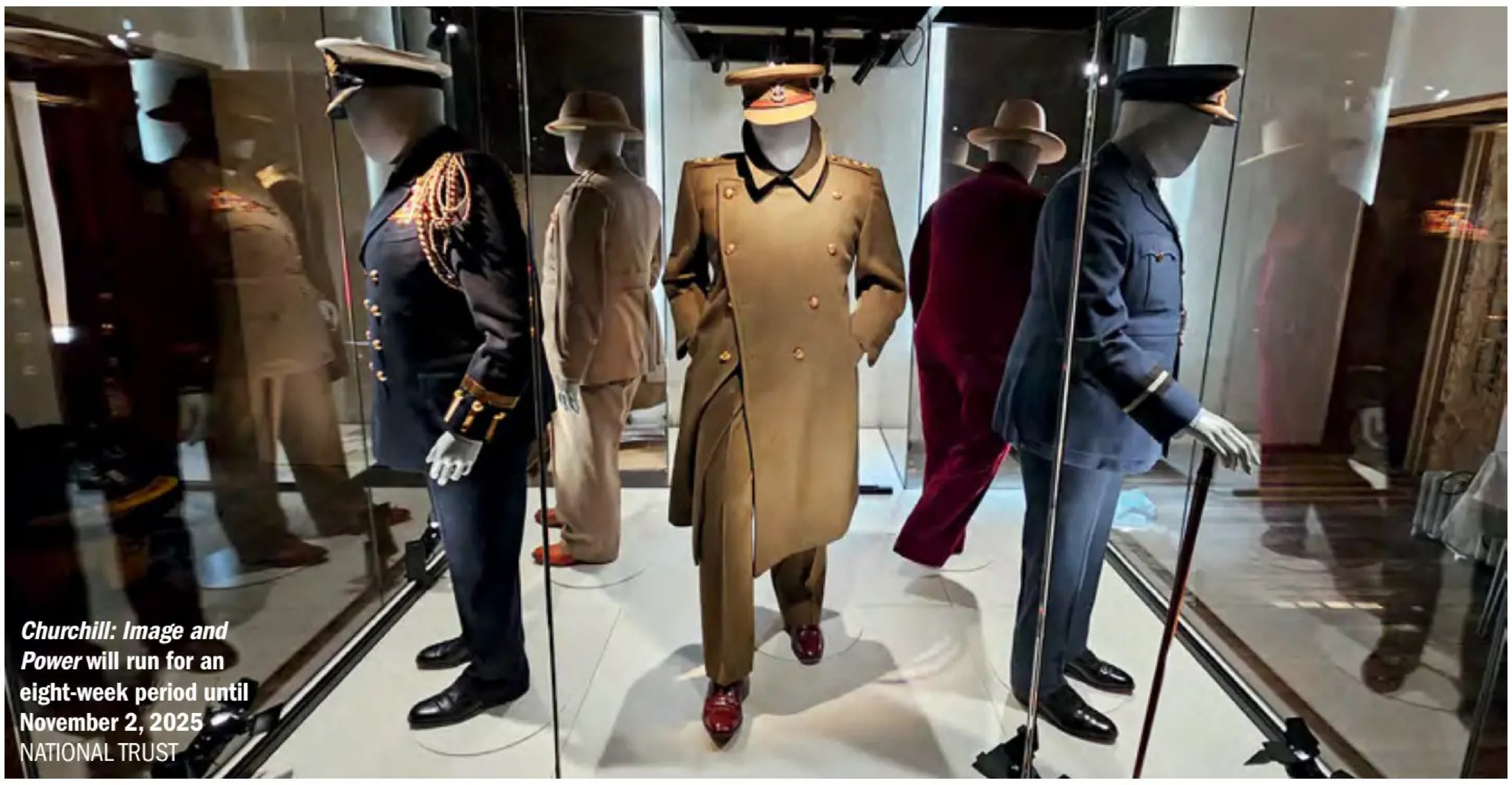
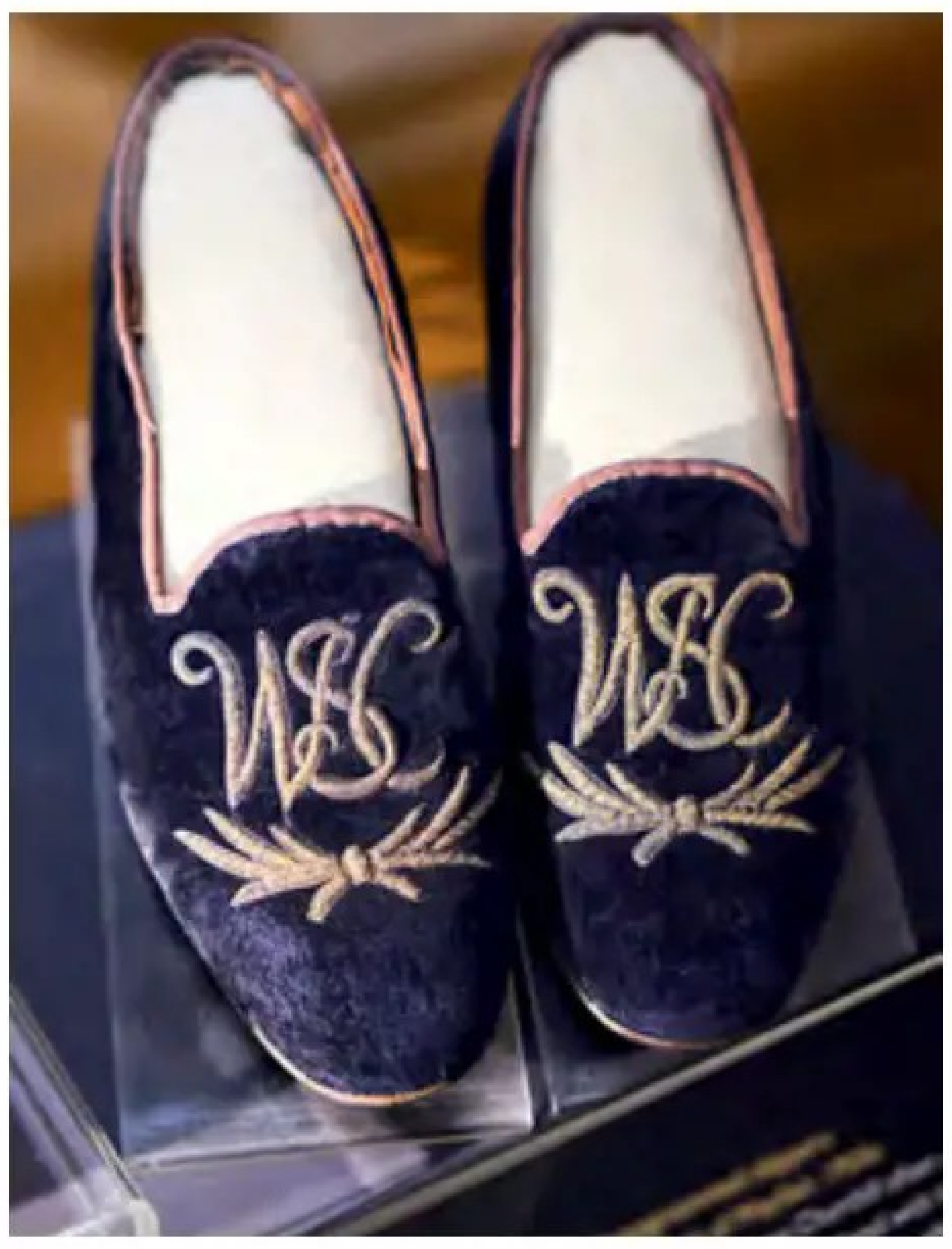
Chartwell exhibition explores Churchill's public persona



Churchill: Image and Power **will run for an eight-week period until November 2, 2025**
NATIONAL TRUST



Churchill's monogrammed velvet slippers
NATIONAL TRUST/ARNHEL DE SERRA

A new exhibition has been launched by The National Trust at Chartwell, Winston Churchill's country home in Westerham, Kent, examining how Britain's wartime leader shaped his public image through clothing and personal style.

Churchill: Image and Power brings together uniforms, accessories and personal effects in Chartwell's newly restored uniform room, which has been returned to its 1930s domestic appearance. The space, once known as the Henry VIII Room, served as a principal guest bedroom where Churchill hosted his famous guests, including T E Lawrence and Charlie Chaplin.

The new exhibition features six uniforms on custom-built mannequins, made to Churchill's exact measurements and posed to capture his distinctive stance, gait and way of addressing a crowd. The garments range across his career and include his army officer's greatcoat as Honorary Colonel of the 4th/5th (Cinque Ports) Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment, his Privy Council full dress tailcoat and his famous siren suit paired with a ten-gallon hat.

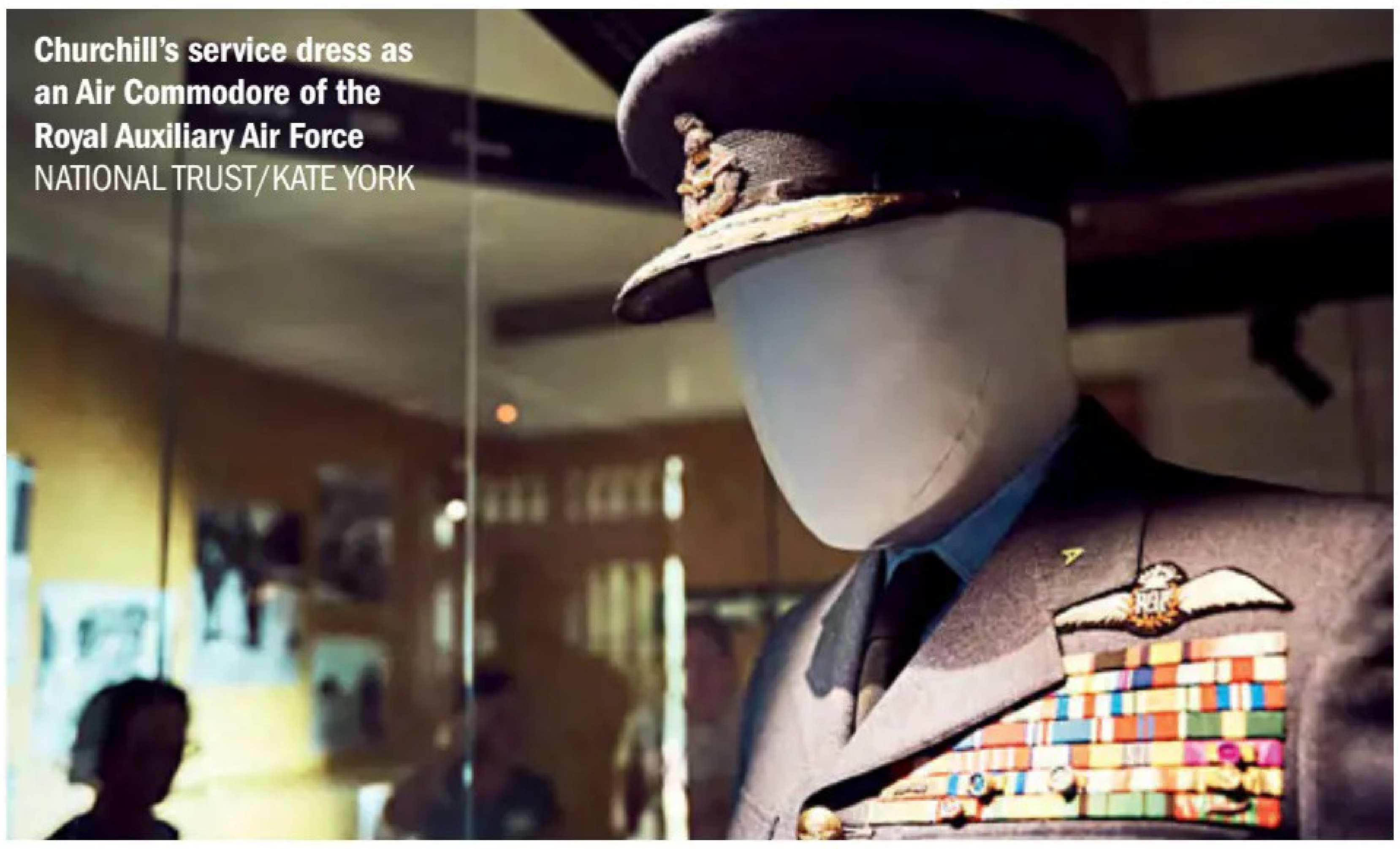
Other uniforms on display include Churchill's uniform as an Elder Brother of Trinity House, his tropical service dress with a pith helmet from his time as Honorary Colonel of the 4th Queen's Hussars and his service dress as an Air Commodore of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force.

Alongside these uniforms are personal accessories that reinforced Churchill's carefully managed public image. These include his monogrammed velvet slippers from N Tuczek of Mayfair, a cigar, a navy bow tie with white dots, Cambridge bowler hat and a duskelue academic cap from the University of Oslo, awarded during his honorary doctorate presentation in 1948.

The exhibition has been made possible by support from National Trust members and donors, who also contributed to the restoration of the uniform room. *Churchill: Image and Power* will run for a limited eight-week period until November 2, before the house closes for winter conservation. During the festive season, selected rooms (excluding the uniform room) will remain open to the public before the house re-opens in spring 2026.

Katherine Carter, property curator at Chartwell, said: "Churchill understood the power of image and that image being memorable. His uniforms, hats and even slippers were part of a carefully curated identity. This exhibition allows us to see Churchill in some of his most iconic guises, which contributed to him being among the most recognisable people in history."

The exhibition presents six uniforms on custom-built mannequins made to Churchill's measurements
NATIONAL TRUST/ARNHEL DE SERRA



Churchill's service dress as an Air Commodore of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force
NATIONAL TRUST/KATE YORK

Brussels' cheeky icon suits up with the Welsh Guards

Eighty-one years after the liberation of Brussels, Manneken Pis, the city's most famous statue, was unveiled in uniform gifted by Welsh Guards. **Tom Baker** reports

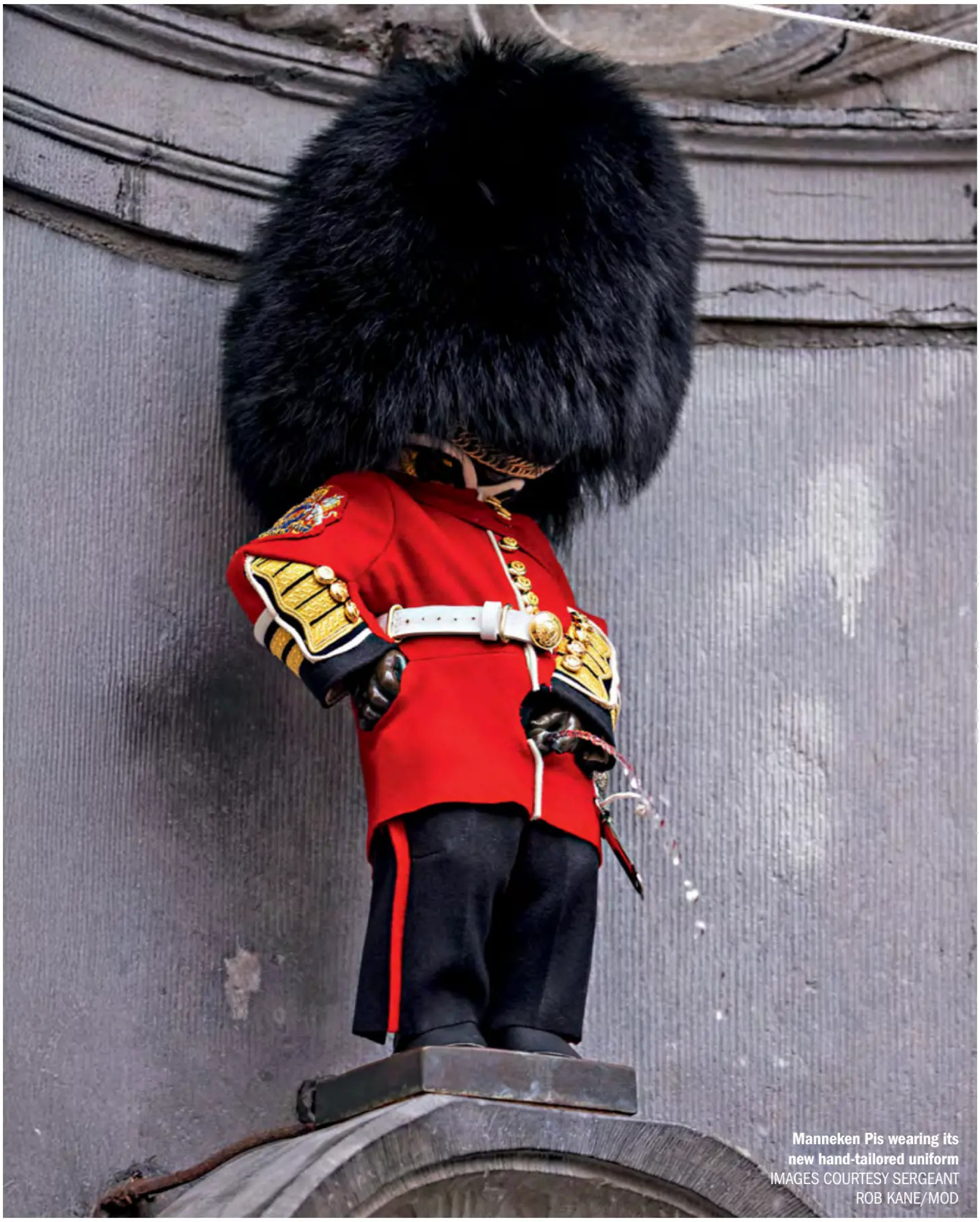
On September 3, 2025, the Welsh Guards marked the 81st anniversary of the liberation of Brussels by presenting a new handmade ceremonial uniform to the Manneken Pis – the 'Little Pissing Man' – the city's iconic fountain statue.

The event took place in Brussels' Grand Place and was attended by the mayor of the city, the British ambassador, representatives from NATO and senior officers from the Welsh Guards. The uniform was formally handed to the city by Regimental Sergeant Major Warrant Officer Class 1 Chris Greaves at the 14th-century City Hall after which it was placed on the statue affectionately known to locals as "the first citizen of Brussels."

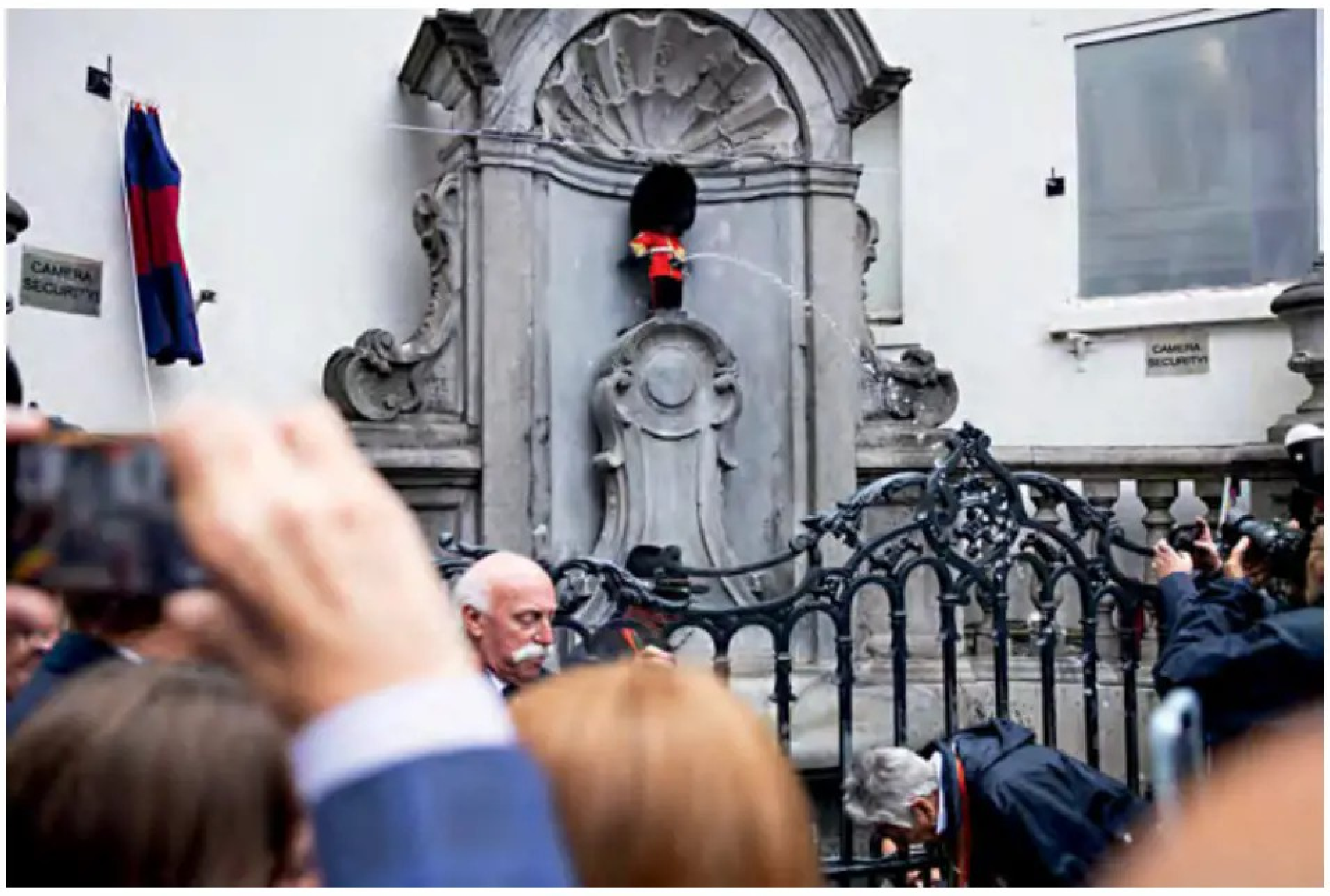
The presentation revived a tradition that began on July 29, 1945, less than a year after the Welsh Guards entered Brussels and liberated it from German occupation. On that occasion, Warrant Officer Ivor Roberts presented the city authorities with a uniform for the Manneken Pis amid cheering crowds, an act that swiftly became a Liberation Day custom. The original costume has since deteriorated and was retired to the Manneken Museum, leaving the statue unclothed during last year's 80th anniversary commemorations.

The new uniform was crafted by 1st Battalion Welsh Guards' tailors over four months, with no detail overlooked. The brainchild of Master Tailor Sergeant Chris Watson, the uniform replicates that of a Regimental Sergeant Major of the Brigade of Guards, comprising a scarlet cloth tunic embroidered with gold lace, five rows of buttons to denote the brigade order of the Welsh Guards, a repurposed bearskin taken from the regimental stores, a miniature cap kerb chain crafted from the links of an officer's spur and a white belt with buckle inscribed with a leek. The statue's miniature sword was crafted by specialist British military suppliers Pooley & Sons.

Following the handover ceremony at City Hall, dignitaries and Welsh Guards representatives proceeded



Manneken Pis wearing its new hand-tailored uniform
IMAGES COURTESY SERGEANT ROB KANE/MOD



On arrival at the fountain, the statue was formally unveiled in its new uniform by Mayor Phillipe Close

Regimental Sergeant Major WO1 Chris Greaves presents the new uniform to Mayor Phillipe Close

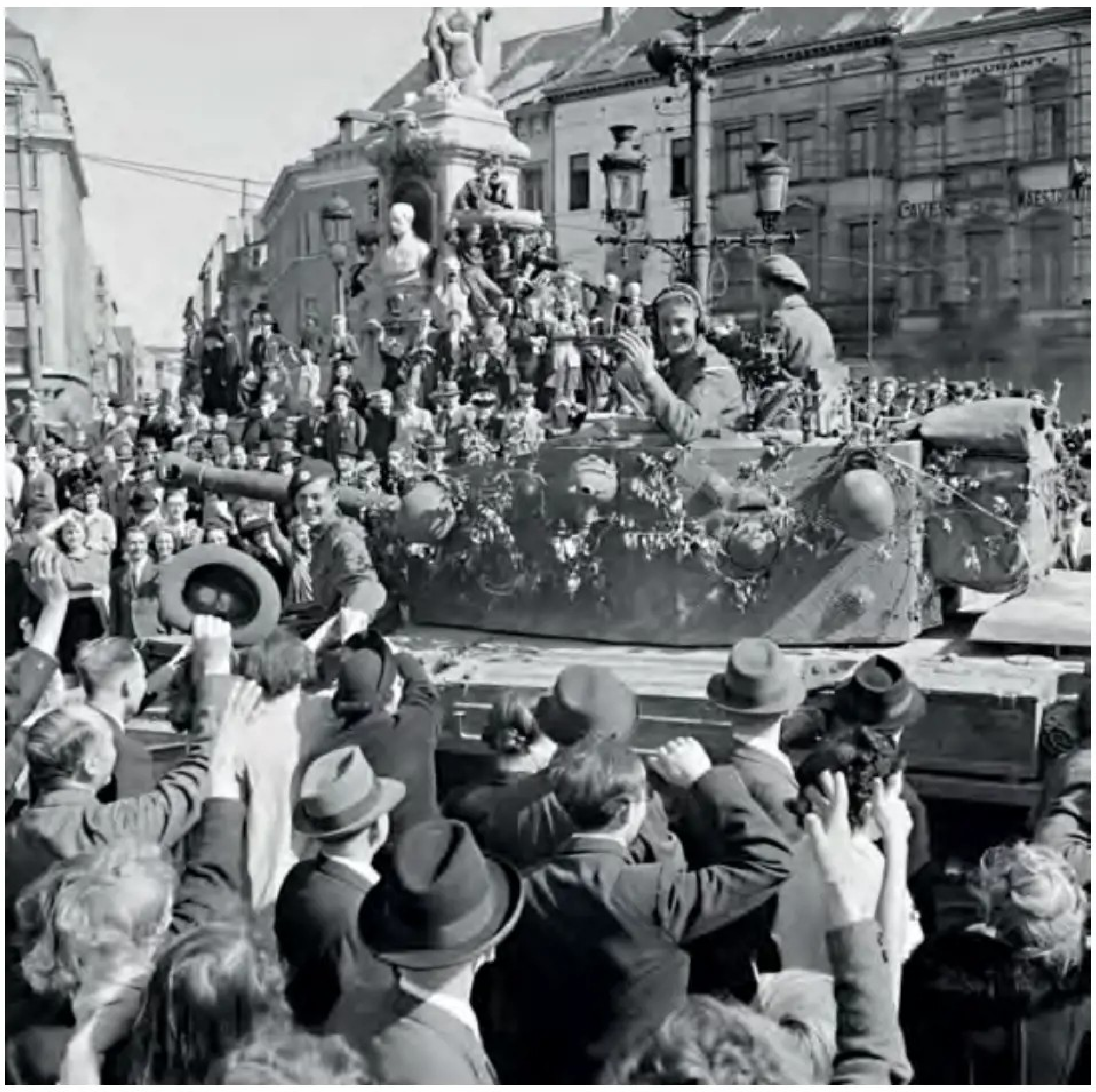
through the Grand Place and the city's historic streets towards Manneken Pis. A brass ensemble from the Band of the Welsh Guards provided music during the march with their rendition of the wartime song *It's a Long Way to Tipperary*. The statue was formally unveiled in its new uniform by Mayor Phillipe Close.

On September 2, 1944, the Guards Armoured Division was in the region of Douai in Northern France when Lieutenant-General Brian Horrocks gave the order for an advance on Brussels, named Operation Grand Intention. The division set off in two lines of advance and on September 3 a column of the 2nd Welsh Guards, led by Lieutenant John Dent, entered the city via the Avenue de Tervuren. The Guards Armoured Division's march of 97 miles in one day was, at the time, the most rapid advance in military history.

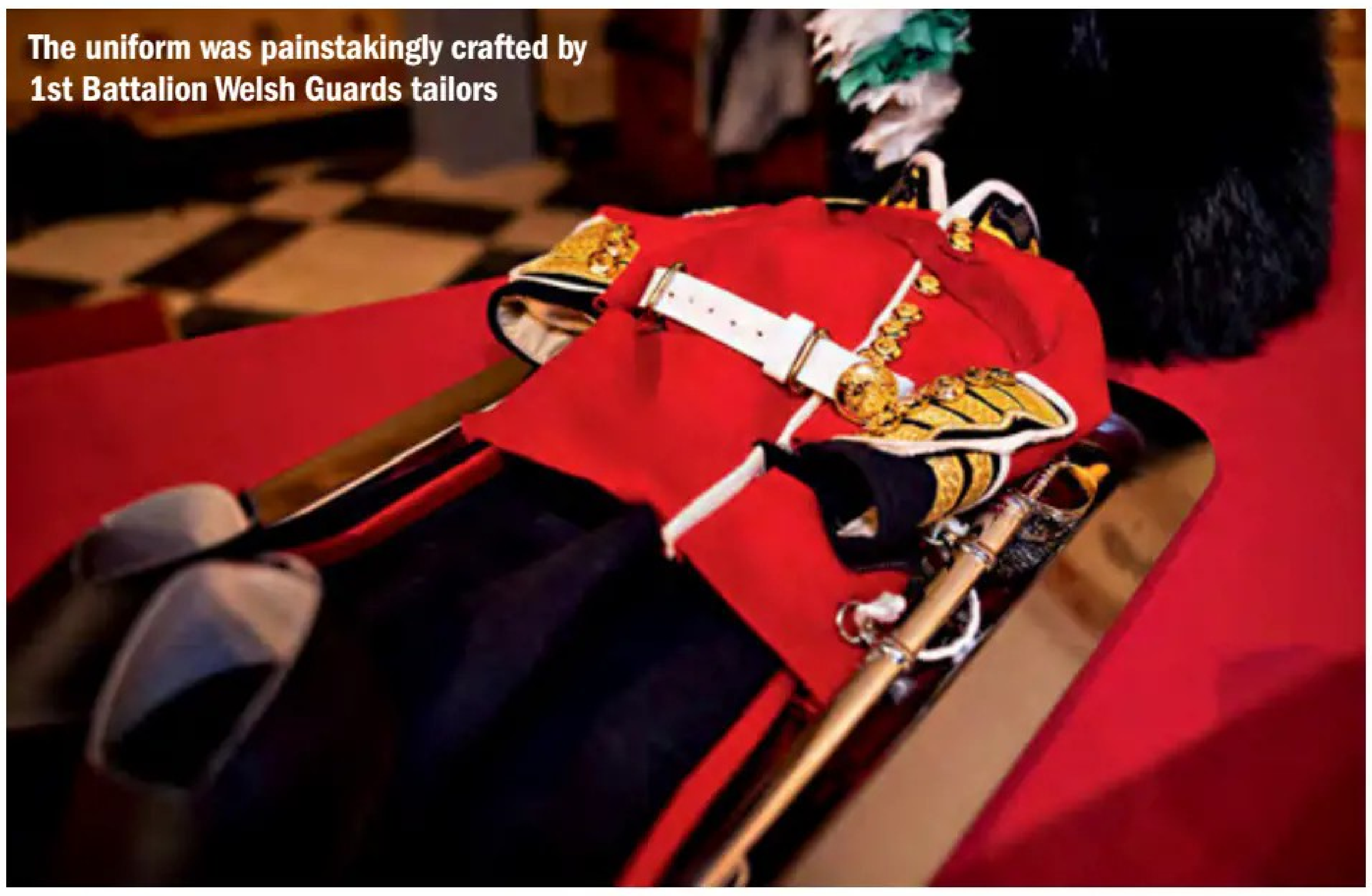
The speed of the advance caught the Germans by surprise, and Gestapo officers and their collaborators were still in the process of burning their records at the Palais de Justice when the Guards entered the city. However, the official history of the Welsh Guards states that any resistance that day "came mostly from the eager Belgian crowds." Dent's tanks are said to have been "engulfed under a mass of flowers, fruit and cheering girls." The arrival of the Welsh Guards in the capital marked the end of four years, three months and 16 days of Nazi occupation, during which some 25,000 Belgian Jews and 16,000 other political prisoners had been sent to death camps and at least 300,000 Belgians had also been condemned to forced labour.

The Manneken Pis itself is a 58cm bronze statue dating from the 17th Century and, according to legend, pays tribute to a child who urinated on the burning fuse of an enemy bomb, saving the city walls from destruction. The statue is dressed in different costumes several times each year, and its wardrobe includes more than 1,100 different outfits. The Welsh Guards uniform is one of a few linked directly to a specific event in the city's long history.

Geoffroy Coomans de Brachène, a member of the Brussels parliament who represented the city at the handover ceremony, said he was honoured to welcome the Welsh Guards and to recognise their past sacrifice: "We remember with gratitude those who 81 years ago contributed to liberating Brussels from the Nazis, among them Welsh soldiers – the Welsh Guards – their courage and their sacrifice, which will remain engraved in our collective memory. Today, through this symbolic gesture of the donation of this ceremonial uniform, we seal once again the friendship between Brussels and the Welsh Guards. This gift will remain a living reminder of the regiment's role in our history and the ties that unite our nations." BW



A Welsh Guards Cromwell drives through Brussels amid cheering crowds on September 3, 1944, following the rapid advance of the Guards Armoured Division to liberate the city IWM BU 480



The uniform was painstakingly crafted by 1st Battalion Welsh Guards tailors

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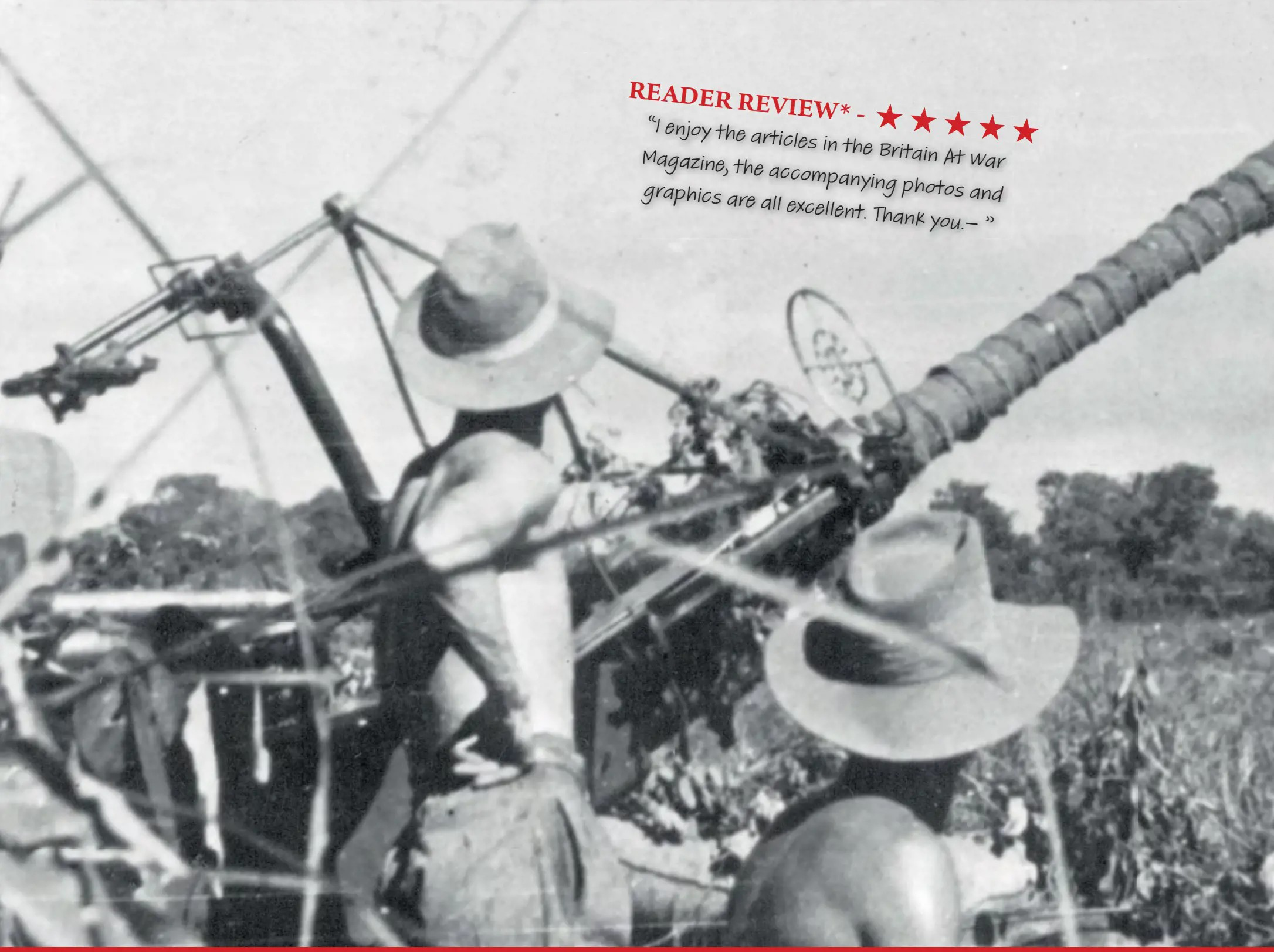

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The 80th anniversary of the battle to capture the capital of Hitler's Third Reich falls in May 2025.

To mark this event we describe the armies, commanders and equipment used in the battle by the German defenders and by the attacking Soviet Red Army during the Battle of Berlin.

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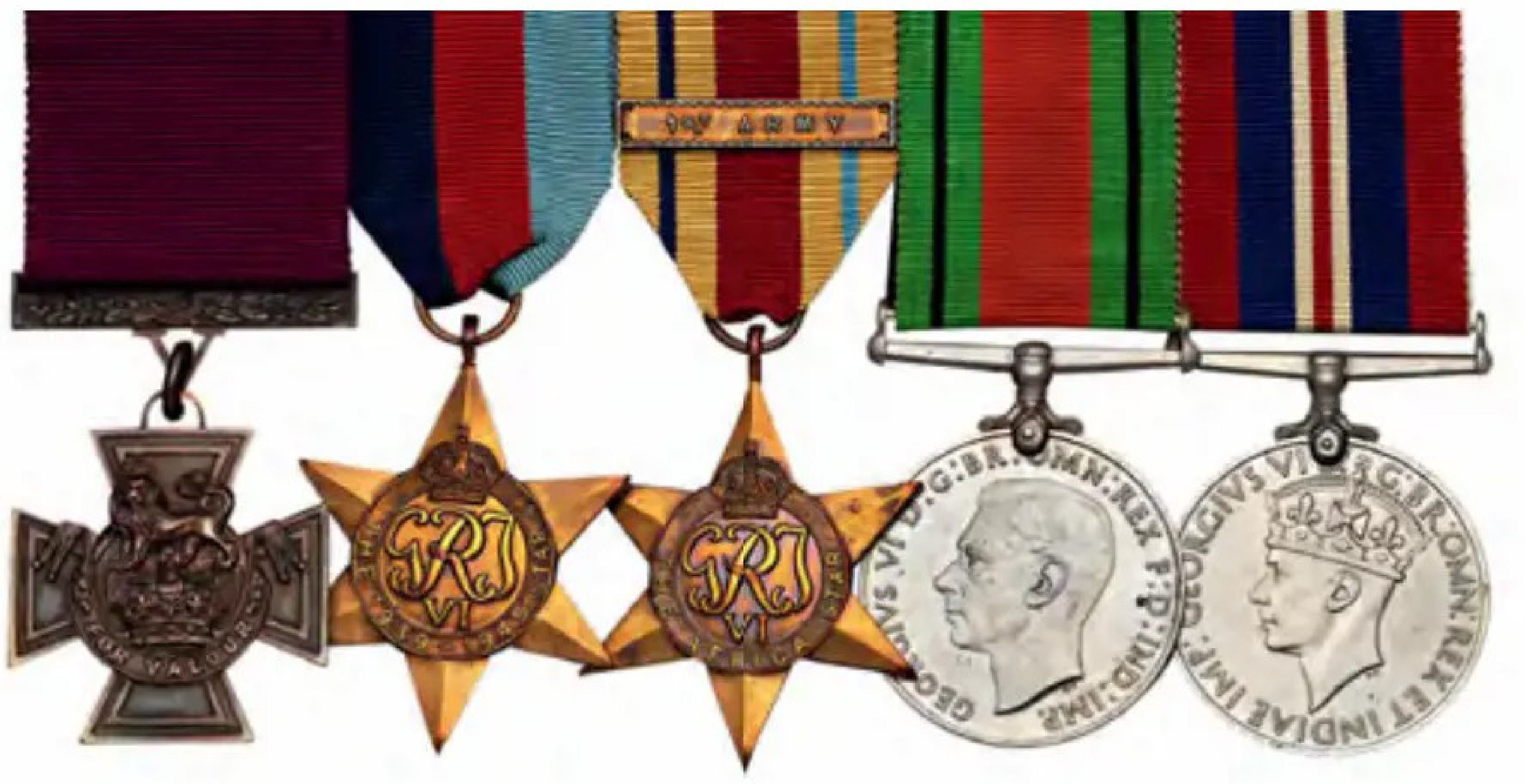
873/25

Despatches

Secret D-Day maps and the VC award to an officer who defied the medical board are among recent auction highlights

DISABLED OFFICER'S VICTORIA CROSS FETCHES £350,000

A posthumous Victoria Cross medal group awarded to a young officer who 'single-handedly' turned the tide of a battle during Operation Vulcan, was recently sold by Spink & Son



SPINK & SON

For the Sandys-Clarke family, gallantry was in no short supply. Willward 'Peter' Sandys-Clarke counted himself related to four Victoria Cross recipients: his maternal grandfather was Colonel Francis Sandys, a cousin of Lord Roberts VC and General Congreve VC, both of whom had sons who followed their fathers in earning Britain's highest award for valour. Such a remarkable lineage made Peter's own path to courage appear almost predetermined.

Born on June 8, 1919, in Southport, Peter was educated at Uppingham School where he excelled as a scholar and a sportsman. By 1938, Sandys-Clarke had joined the Territorial Army and received a commission with the 5th Battalion, The Loyal (North Lancashire) Regiment.

On the outbreak of war, the 5th Battalion was mobilised and converted into a motorised reconnaissance unit for home defence. However, in September 1940, fate dealt Sandys-Clarke a cruel blow when a "dreadful" motorcycle accident left him with serious injuries, including partial paralysis of the face, impaired vision in one eye and deafness in his left ear. Over the next two years, the young officer was twice declared unfit for service.

Refusing to accept a quiet war, Sandys-Clarke persuaded the medical board to pass him on his third attempt and the officer returned to his regiment, in 'B' Company, 1st Battalion. The battalion was posted to the Mediterranean in 1943 as part of the 78th Division, and after landing in Algiers on March 9, came to their lines at Medjez el Bab. The division, part of the First Army, began preparing for Operation Vulcan – an offensive that hoped to destroy the final Axis forces in North Africa: Heeresgruppe 'Afrika' held up in Tunisia.

Having got wind of the offensive, the Germans launched a spoiling attack on the night of April 20/21. Sandys-Clarke and his company were in the thick of the fighting and repelled multiple assaults from their dug-in positions until relieved by Churchill tanks of the North Irish Horse.

On April 23, Operation Vulcan was launched. Sandys-Clarke and The Loyals were charged to take German positions atop the Gueriat el Atach ridge. The attack began at 0200hrs, and by 0400hrs, 'B' Company was making good ground, but most of the officers had been mortally wounded. As the British artillery fell quiet, a "savage" German counterattack fell on Sandys-Clarke and his men and 'B' Company's CO, Captain Grant, was killed. Command passed to Sandys-Clarke.

The young officer promptly brought up Churchills to assist the men while they fell back to forward HQ, where Sandys-Clarke learned he was the sole officer surviving of all those who had gone up the hill that morning.

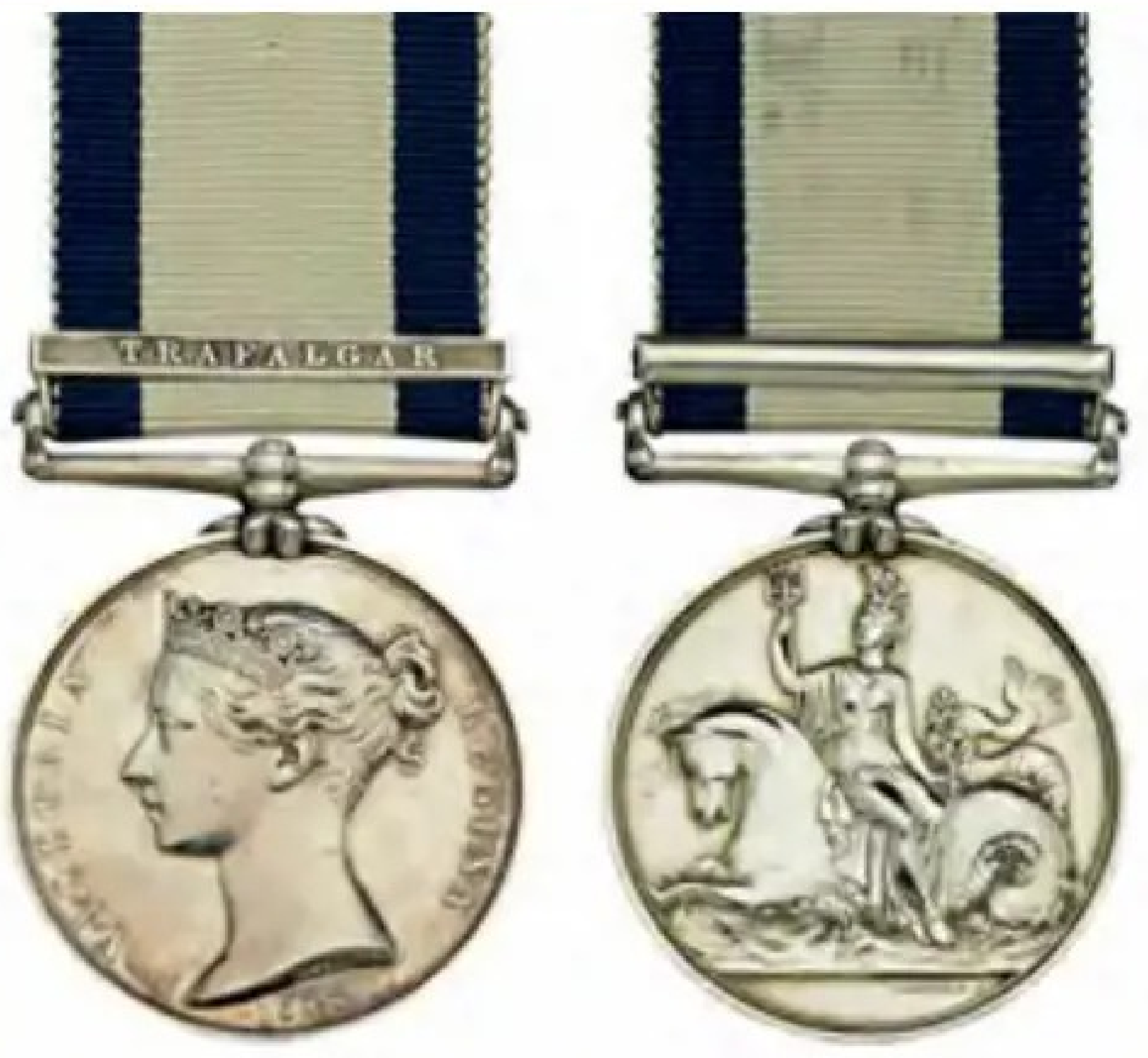
Binding a serious head wound, Sandys-Clarke was convinced his survivors could retake the Gueriat el Atach ridge and rallied a scratch platoon of 25 men. What followed was an epic feat of personal gallantry, described by his comrades as "the stuff of legend". Armed only with grenades and his revolver, Sandys-Clarke led the men up the ridge then single-handedly stormed three German machine gun posts and an anti-tank position. He then led his platoon on to the objective, neutralised the opposition and consolidated the shattered British line. Moments later, the platoon came under sniper fire and, without hesitating, the lieutenant advanced on his own to clear the opposition. He was killed outright.

Eight days after Sandys-Clarke's death, his wife Irene gave birth to a son, Robin Peter. Shielded by her family and friends, she was only told of her husband's sacrifice once the child was delivered. Her husband's VC was announced in June 1943, and Irene went to Buckingham Palace to receive the award from King George VI on June 14, 1944.

The lot, comprising Sandys-Clarke's VC, 1939-45 Star, Africa Star, Defence Medal and War Medal 1939-45, was offered alongside a rich archive including his Uppingham rugby cap and letters sent to his wife. The Spink & Son lot surpassed expectations to fetch £350,000.

TRAFALGAR SURVIVOR'S MEDAL DEFIES ESTIMATE

A Naval GSM awarded to the 'last Maltese survivor' of HMS *Victory*, smashed its upper guide at Noonans



NOONANS

John Tart was just 20 when he transferred to HMS *Victory*. He was among six Maltese sailors to join *Victory* in 1804 and, after volunteering, participated in the blockade of Toulon, the chase of Villeneuve's fleet to the West Indies, and the 1805 Battle of Trafalgar. After the battle, a British Parliamentary Grant issued £300,000 to be apportioned among every officer, seaman and marine who had participated at Trafalgar. Tart and his fellow Maltese sailors received £4 12s 6d, followed by £1 17s 6d in 1806.

In 1847, the Admiralty authorised the Naval General Service Medal, retroactively recognising service in naval engagements between 1793-1840. Some 20,933 were sanctioned, and 118 were issued to *Victory's* seamen with the coveted Trafalgar clasp. However, few sailors claimed the award; the majority had died or failed to apply due to the lack of publicity surrounding the medal release.

John Tart, aged 63 in 1847, was the last surviving Maltese sailor to have participated in the battle and one of a handful of Trafalgar participants recorded on Victory's muster roll to claim medal and clasp. Given an upper guide of £14,000, the extremely rare medal prompted a fierce bidding war, fetching £22,000.

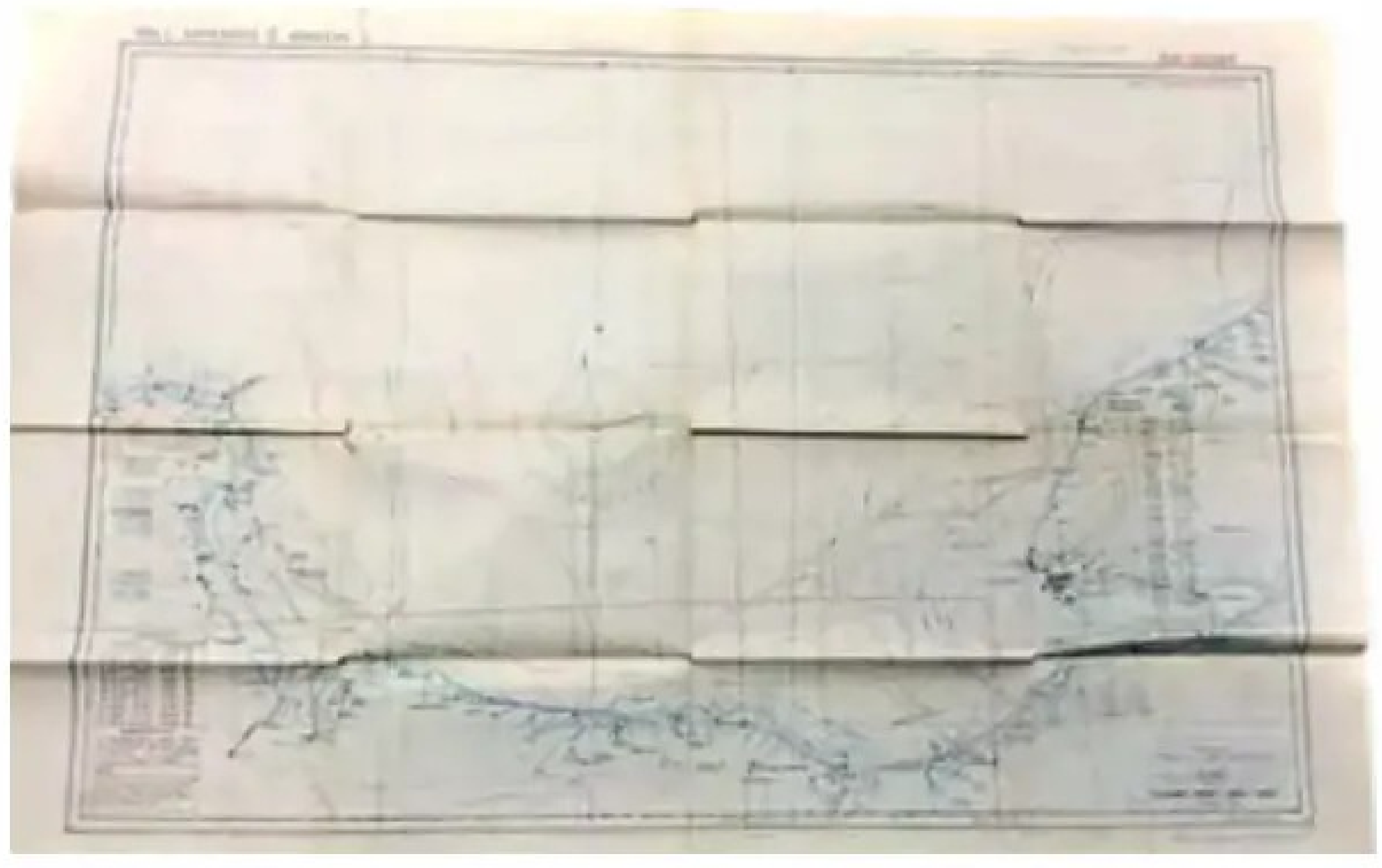
SECRET D-DAY MAPS NAVIGATE TO £27,000

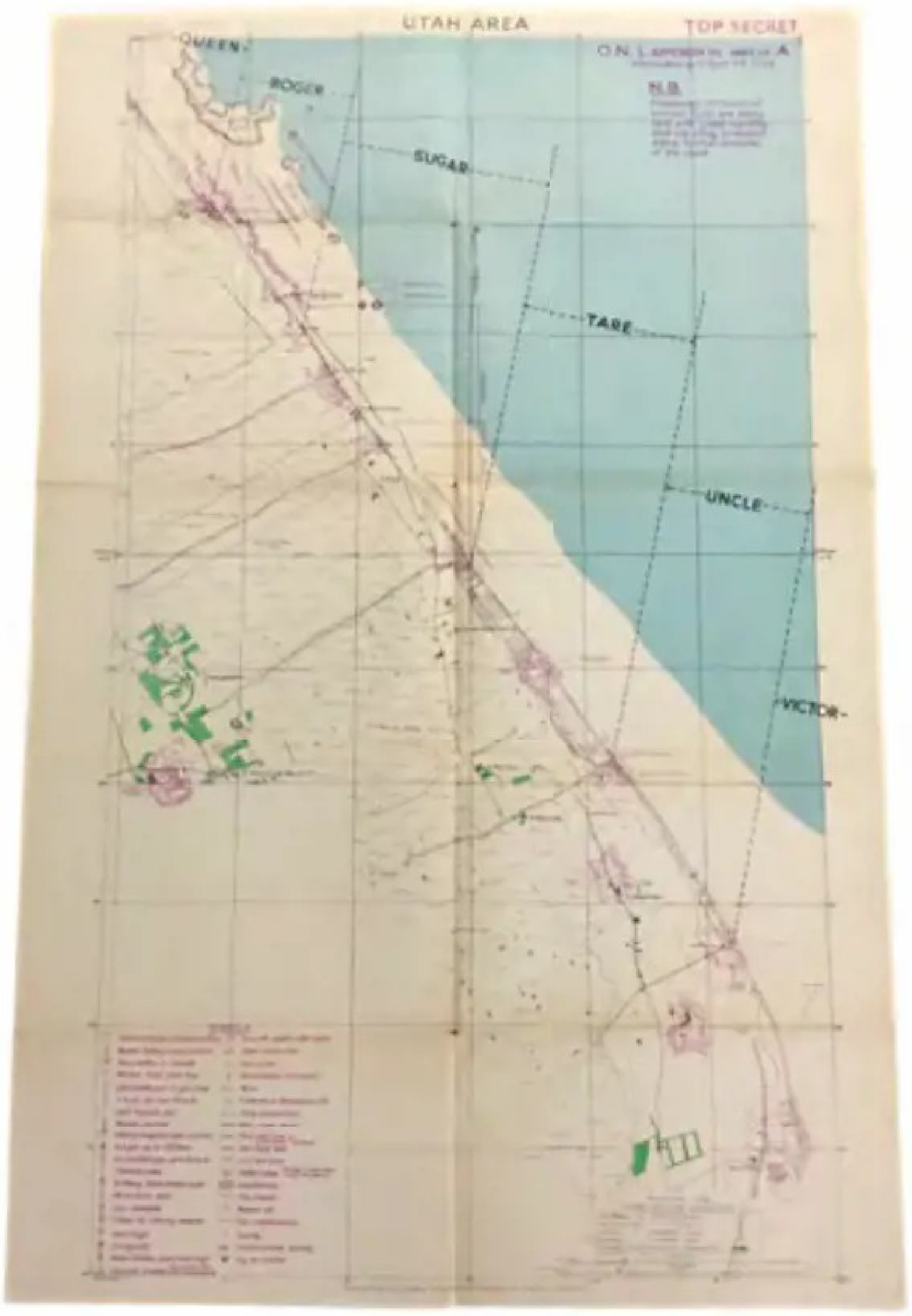
Top-secret charts used by an LCT commander during the Normandy landings have sold for far above their estimate

Hidden in a £10 job lot of papers, a collection of once secret maps used to assist Allied landing craft to navigate German defences during the D-Day landings has sold for £27,200 with Hansons Auctioneers. The documents, which charted the five invasion beaches in extraordinary detail, belonged to Sub Lieutenant Walter Page, who served aboard LCT 2138 during the pivotal events of June 6, 1944.

Page was born in Burton-upon-Trent in 1916, losing his father that same year, killed while serving on the Somme. By trade a pattern maker, Page joined the RNVR and, in 1944, was commissioned a temporary sub-lieutenant. He was posted to LCT 2138, a US-made vessel transferred to Britain through Lend-Lease. On D-Day, it formed part of Assault Force 'U1', 10th Flotilla. Page and his crew were tasked with ferrying men and equipment from the 49th Engineers Combat Battalion on to Utah beach in the first wave of the invasion.

The six maps Page carried – a composite chart of all five beaches, and individual sheets for Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword – were produced by the Admiralty's Hydrographic Department in March 1944. At 1:12,500 scale, they recorded villages, hedgerows, marshes, roads and rivers, but their value to LCT commanders lay in charting fortifications along the Atlantic Wall, from gun emplacements and bunkers to minefields, anti-tank obstacles, gun nests and trenches.





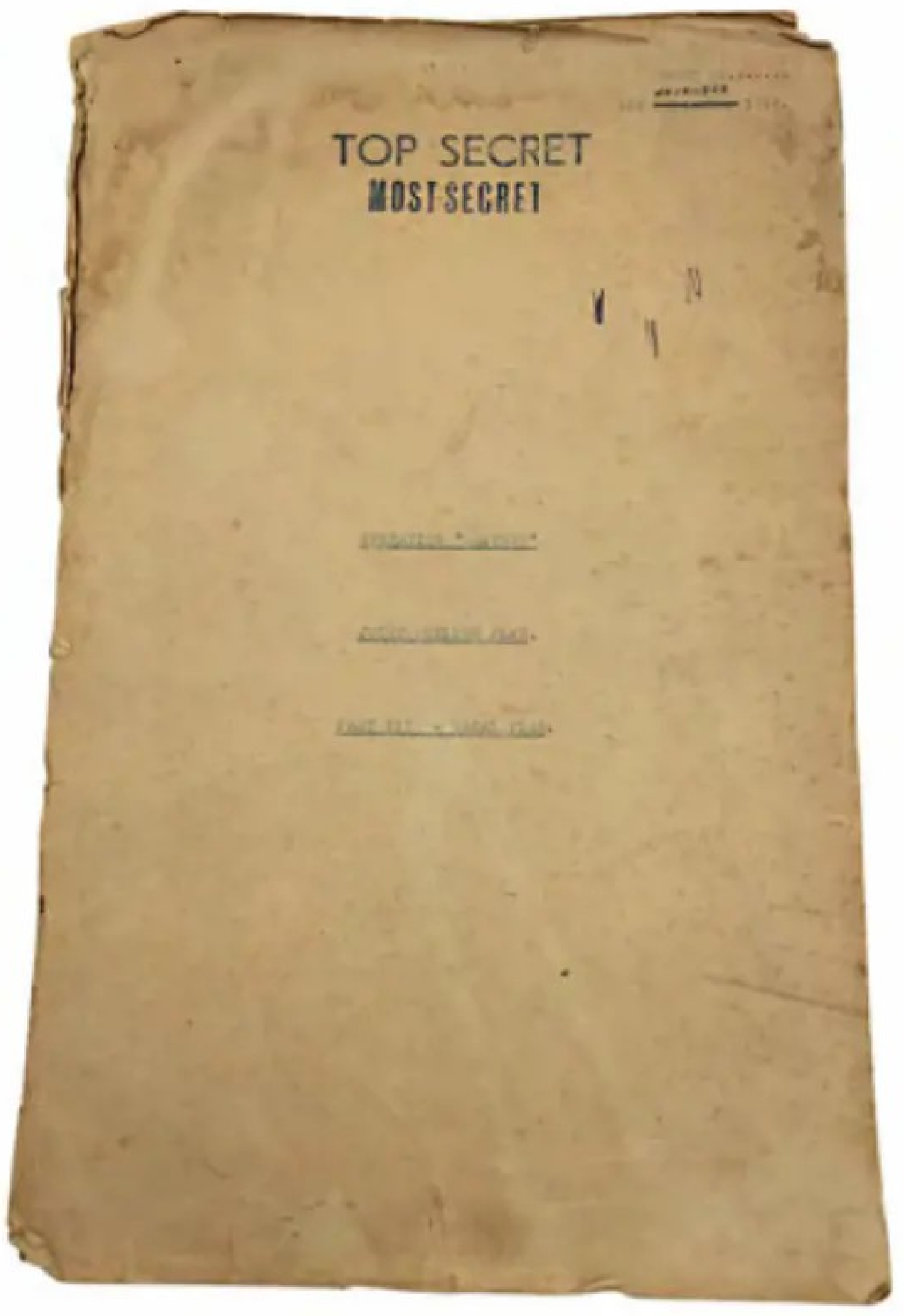
The detail shown on the maps was the product of years of Allied intelligence-gathering. From 1942, reconnaissance aircraft flew hundreds of sorties over northern France, capturing images of coastal fortifications that were then analysed by interpreters at Danesfield House, Medmenham. This data was supplemented by information from the French Resistance and Commando raids, alongside covert surveys conducted by small submarines.

At the Hansons sale, bidding quickly carried the lots beyond their estimates. The composite chart covering all five beaches doubled its upper estimate, fetching £6,000, while the maps for Juno, Omaha, Utah, Sword and Gold all smashed their guide, fetching £4,100, £4,000, £3,400, £3,100 and £2,800, respectively.

Another item hidden in the job lot and sold alongside the D-Day charts was an original "Top Secret" naval plan for Operation Nestegg, the British scheme for the liberation of the German-occupied Channel Islands. Earmarked for Page and LCT 2138, Nestegg was drawn up in anticipation of the German surrender of Jersey and Guernsey and set out plans for their simultaneous occupation.

Dated November 1, 1944, the 47-page document outlined the operation. It specified that Guernsey and Jersey were to be occupied "as nearly simultaneously as possible by landing the occupying forces through the ports of St Peter's Port (Guernsey) and St Helier (Jersey)". The plan assumed that "the German Commander has agreed to unconditional surrender and has accepted the terms of the surrender which he will comply with in detail", while acknowledging "sporadic small arms fire from isolated enemy posts may be encountered".

The Channel Islands remained under German occupation until May 9, 1945. Estimated at £800-£1,200, the secret plan sold for £3,800.



TOP SECRET
MOST SECRET

HANSONS

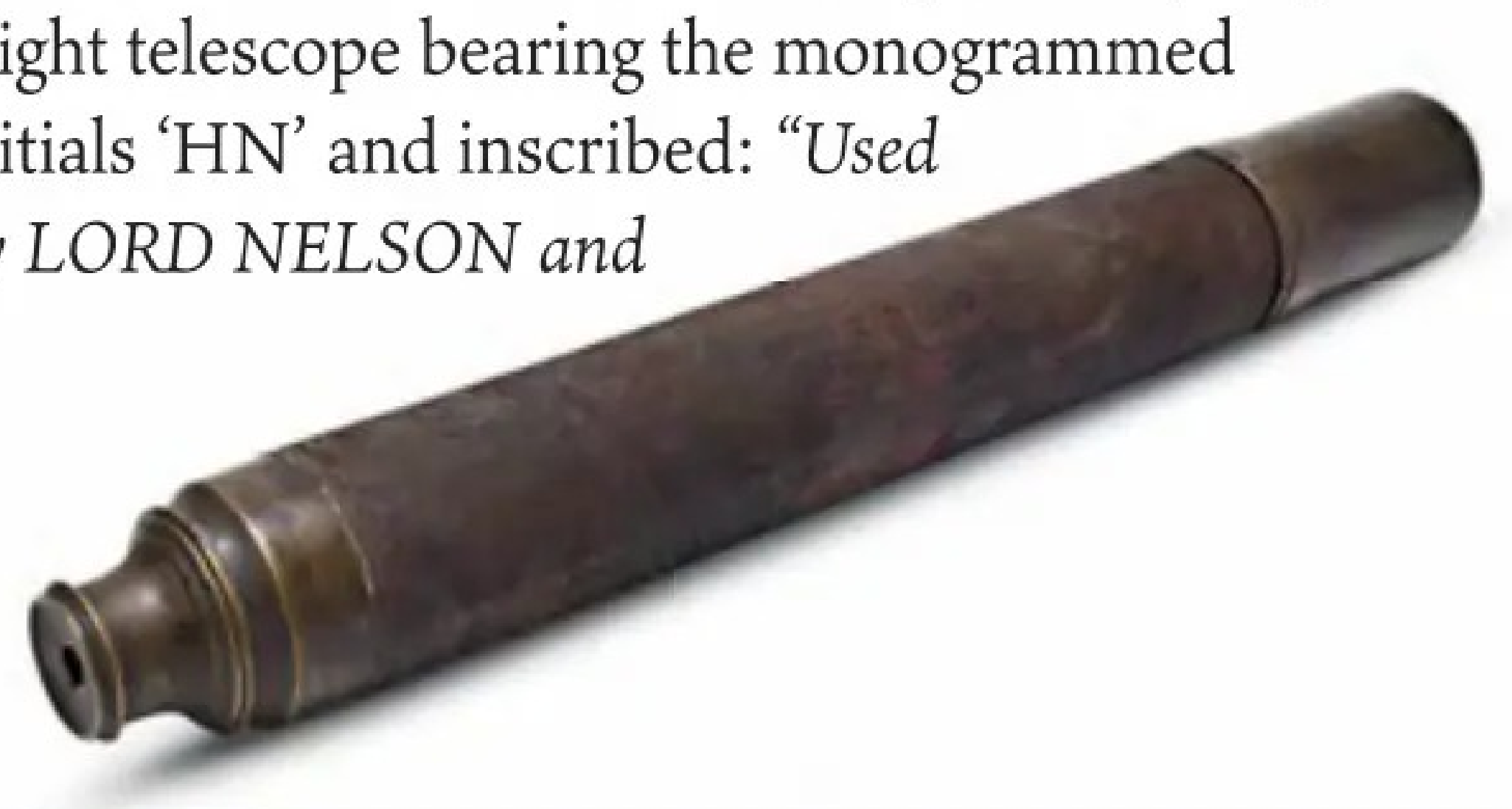
VICE-ADMIRAL NELSON TELESCOPE COMMANDS ATTENTION

A telescope presented by Vice-Admiral Lord Nelson to a young officer of his squadron has attracted strong interest at Halls Fine Art.

Lieutenant Edward Palmer entered the Royal Navy on June 20, 1803, under the patronage of HRH the Duke of Kent, and joined HMS *Donegal* as a First-Class Volunteer. Serving under Captains Sir Richard John Strachan and Pulteney Malcolm, he was soon in action, sharing in the capture of the Spanish frigate *Amfitrite* in 1804. The following year, *Donegal* and Palmer accompanied Nelson's fleet in their pursuit of the French and Spanish fleets to the West Indies.

After assisting in the capture of the *El Rayo*, a 100-gun ship of the line, Palmer served at the Battle of San Domingo, and by July 1805 was advanced to midshipman. He later joined *Kingfisher* and then *Aurora* in the Mediterranean, where he was wounded. Palmer was promoted to lieutenant in 1809 and subsequently saw service aboard *Rinaldo, Oberon, Warrior, Cossack, Caledonia* and Esk, before retiring in 1817.

Nelson gifted several telescopes to promising officers under his command, including Palmer, who in 1805 received a Dolland (London) Day and Night telescope bearing the monogrammed initials 'HN' and inscribed: *"Used by LORD NELSON and presented by him, to Lieutenant Edward Gascoigne Palmer."* The artefact sold for £1,800.



HALLS FINE ART

FORTHCOMING SALES

- **Noonans** October 8 & November 5, 2025
- **C&T Auctioneers** October 15, 2025
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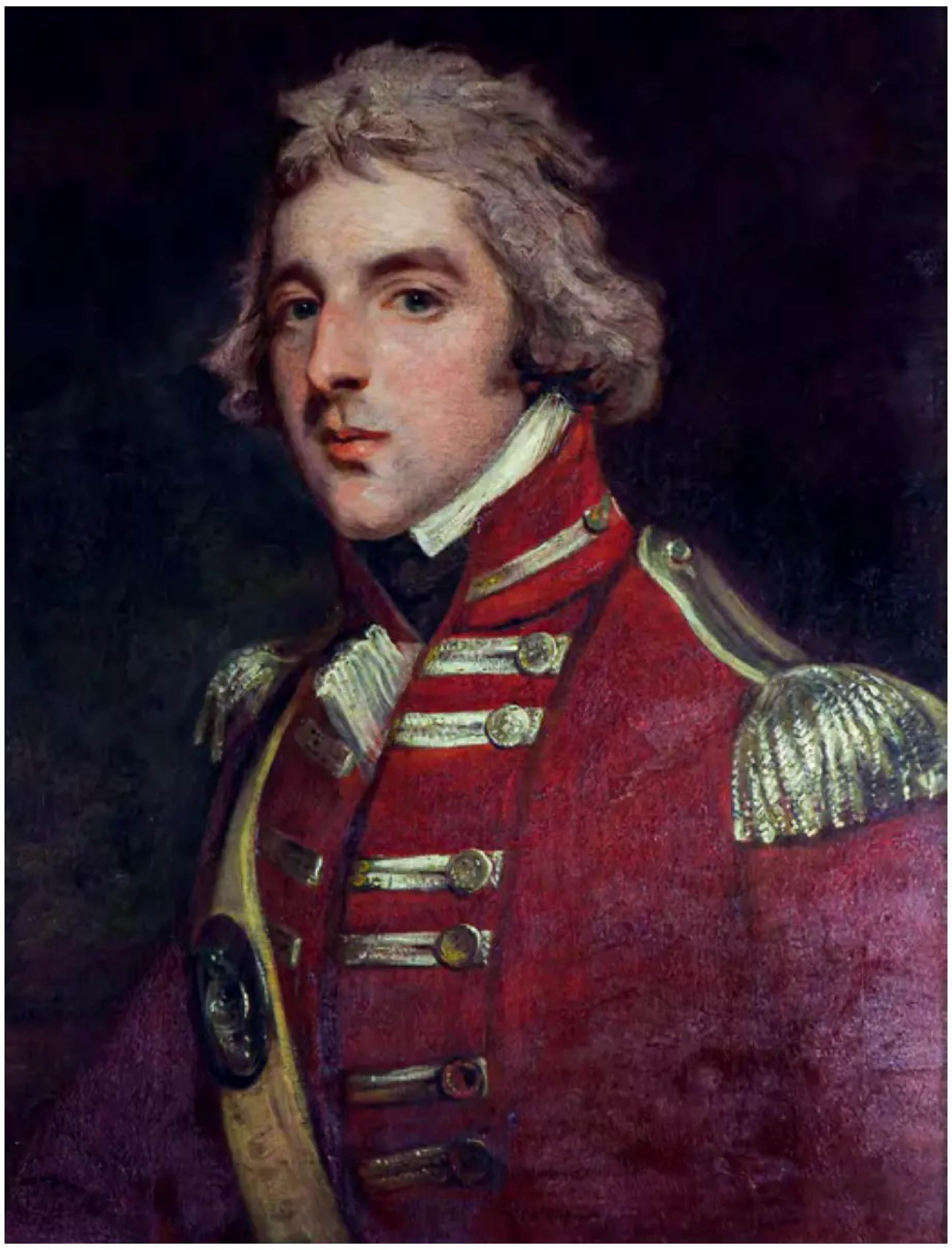
- **McTear's** October 22, 2025
- **Wilson55** October 22, 2025
- **Adam Partridge Auctioneers & Valuers** October 23-24, 2025
- **Harper Field Auctioneers & Valuers** November 5-6, 2025
- **Hansons Auctioneers** November 12, 2025

NOTE: Listings include medals, militaria, arms and armour, war art and other historical-themed sales. Dates and catalogues are subject to change. Check websites for details and updates.

Debrief

We used Google trends to find six common questions on **British Army commission purchasing** and now an expert gives informed answers.

THIS MONTH'S HISTORIAN: **GERRY VAN TONDER**



In 1793, 24-year-old Arthur Wellesley, the future Duke of Wellington, purchased a lieutenant-colonelcy to command of the 33rd Regiment JOHN HOPPNER (ARTIST)/STRATFIELD SAYE HOUSE

What was the commission purchase system?

The process of obtaining rank by buying a position was formalised in 1683. With the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, the Crown was determined to take full control of the English Army. It was believed that maintaining loyal, wealthy and aristocratic 'gentlemen' in command would ensure fealty. The premise was that an officer's investment acted as a bond for continued good behaviour.

After the English Civil War – in which deaths are estimated at 7% of the population – public sentiment was that there was little need for a standing army. Both Royalist and Parliamentarian formations were expensive and ill-disciplined, so vesting power in any group other than a small military elite, who would serve out of honour rather than for financial gain, would threaten peace and stability. Selling commissions was seen to be a way to limit the officer corps to noblemen and gentlemen.

Officially, purchasing was restricted to cavalry and infantry regiments. Engineer and artillery graduates of the Royal Military Academy – technical branches that required officers be promoted on merit or seniority and strictly excluded purchase – were often looked down upon as being not quite gentlemen by those of the army of the British East India Company and the aristocratic class. The Royal Navy never entertained purchasing and its officers were solely advanced by merit and seniority. Even so, nepotism was a powerful tool and a young gentleman could advance quicker if he was fortunate enough to have an admiral in his family – assuming he passed his examinations.

How did the system work?

Young men who wanted to be officers in the British Army could purchase regimental commissions, buying in as an ensign. Once on the promotional ladder, movement up the ranks could be achieved by further purchasing, although only up to the rank of colonel.

Prospective new officers had to be between 16 and 21, literate and show a letter of recommendation from an officer of at least major rank. Commissions could be bought from the government or from officers wanting to sell their commission and retire. Regimental agents were empowered by unit commanders to receive monies for commissions and would submit the details of the applicant, including letters of recommendation, to the adjutant general's office for the commander-in-chief's endorsement. Only authorised agents were permitted to act in the sale or purchase of commissions. The price for each rank was regulated, with the process controlled by the War Office.

During the Crimean War, a substantial number of commissions were given and promotions made without purchase, so the Secretary of State was required to authorise any officer wishing to sell their commission. Sellers would receive £100 for each year's service (£9,311 today, based on 1856 figures), with the balance of the commission value paid into a reserve fund.

Those of financial means often employed the technique of going on half-pay before transferring into other regiments to gain rapid, uncomplicated promotion. They might purchase a captaincy and later transfer to half-pay (regarded as temporary retirement) then wait the required years before buying the post of major in a regiment with a vacancy.

Was it an elite 'club' for the rich and titled?

Between the prolonged peace of 1815-1853, commission purchasing became fashionable to enhance status without the bother of going into battle. By 1830, 78% of those with general rank were of the titled aristocracy and landed gentry. Before the outbreak of World War Two, this had dropped to 52% and, by 1952, was down to 39%.

Through the 1800s, the Guards regiments became increasingly exclusive to the upper echelons of society. While the number of aristocratic officers dwindled in other regiments, outsiders were actively excluded from the Guards. The Duke of Wellington reportedly said: "It is promotion by purchase which brings into the service men who have some connection with the interests and fortunes of the country." In 1837, commissions in the Foot Guards were valued at £1,200 for ensigns, £2,050 for lieutenants, £4,800 for a captaincy, £8,300 for majors and £9,000 for a lieutenant-colonelcy – the latter equivalent to £873,000 today.

However, for many officers, commissions for purchase were scarce and a recognised auction room in Charles Street, London, was established for black market trade, where commissions often sold for double the officially stipulated price.

How prevalent was purchasing?

Between 1791-1815, a period covering multiple major conflicts, only 33% of British Army commissions had been purchased. When in 1871 the Cardwell Reforms were introduced, this had dropped to 20%.

Regardless of socio-economic standing, the outlay of substantial capital was not the only limit to entering the purchase system. The expense associated with being an officer was a considerable barrier, regardless of class. The reality was that many in the landed gentry were not cash liquid, their wealth tied up in assets. Even Arthur Wellesley, the 1st Duke of Wellington, looked to his brother to assist his passage up the ranks – Wellington became a major by purchase in the 33rd Foot in 1793, and his brother loaned him more to purchase a lieutenant-colonelcy. A late-Victorian officer had to self-fund almost every aspect of his life and was expected to acquire his own uniform and accoutrements, equipment and horses. For example, sustenance in the officers' mess was of a standard befitting to status, so dining was not cheap. Officers were also expected to contribute to other causes, such as a polo fund or the regimental band.

Was purchasing a militarily sound system?

This is the big question. Officers ill-suited to command and who blundered may well have purchased their commissions, yet few would argue that the Duke of Wellington, who benefited from purchasing, was not a top general of his day.

Within the officer corps there was a high demand for individuals from elevated socio-economic-status groups, based on the premise that their upbringing equipped them well for army life and that they had higher moral character. Proponents argued that such officers were financially independent and not prone to corruption or looting. In addition to saving the government huge sums, purchasing was a valuable source of revenue – monies that could be used to finance military operations or other state expenses.

However, there were disasters when untrained senior officers failed on the battlefield, perhaps none more so than Lieutenant-General James Brudenell, 7th Earl of Cardigan. In 1832, the 35-year-old Lord Brudenell purchased the colonelcy of the 15th Hussars for a staggering £40,000 (£3,880,000 today). Two years later, he was dismissed as the unit's commander "for preferring unfounded charges against an inferior, and for establishing a system of tyrannic espionage against his officers."

The *Taunton Courier* was direct in its indictment: "Lord Brudenell is unfit to command the 15th Hussars. For what then is he fit? For what is he to be paid? As the matter stands, the country is charged with an inefficient lieutenant-colonel; he will be general hereafter, and then we shall pay an increased burden. These matters should be looked to. His Lordship gained his unmerited rank by one of those juggles which the Horse Guards has been so ingenious in contriving to promote wealth and aristocracy."

Despite being cashiered, Brudenell pulled strings to command the 11th Hussars, but alienated himself further by mismanaging his staff, prioritising image and status above military efficiencies. His most notorious exploit took place on October 25, 1854, when, in command of the Light Brigade at Balaclava, he led the doomed charge of legend.

Why was the purchase scheme abolished?

Several incidents highlighted the weaknesses of the purchase system. During the Napoleonic Wars, army leadership was often criticised for its incompetence, which many attributed to the prevalence of purchased commissions. In response, reforms were introduced in the early 19th Century. The Duke of Wellington also implemented measures to improve officer selection and training. However, these did not address the fundamental issue.

In 1865, former Assistant Secretary to the Treasury, Sir Charles Edward Trevelyan MP, sought to end what he called "the indefensible system". In a scathing discourse in parliament on April 30, 1867, he said of the situation: "The primary and indispensable qualification is not professional knowledge, or long and good service, or superior ability, but money. The army cannot be in any real sense of the word a profession while the purchase system exists. Officers have to pay for the privilege of belonging to the army; and, except under very extraordinary circumstances, they can hope for promotion only by making further payments."

The 1871 Cardwell Reforms ended purchasing – but not without controversy. Officers and their families had invested millions, and when a man was promoted, he sold his junior commission to help pay for the more expensive senior commission. The Army Purchase Commission was formed to address this issue by buying back outstanding commissions at both a regulation and an average over-regulation price for each individual regiment. Suffice to say, disputes arose, resulting in litigation. BW

Field Post

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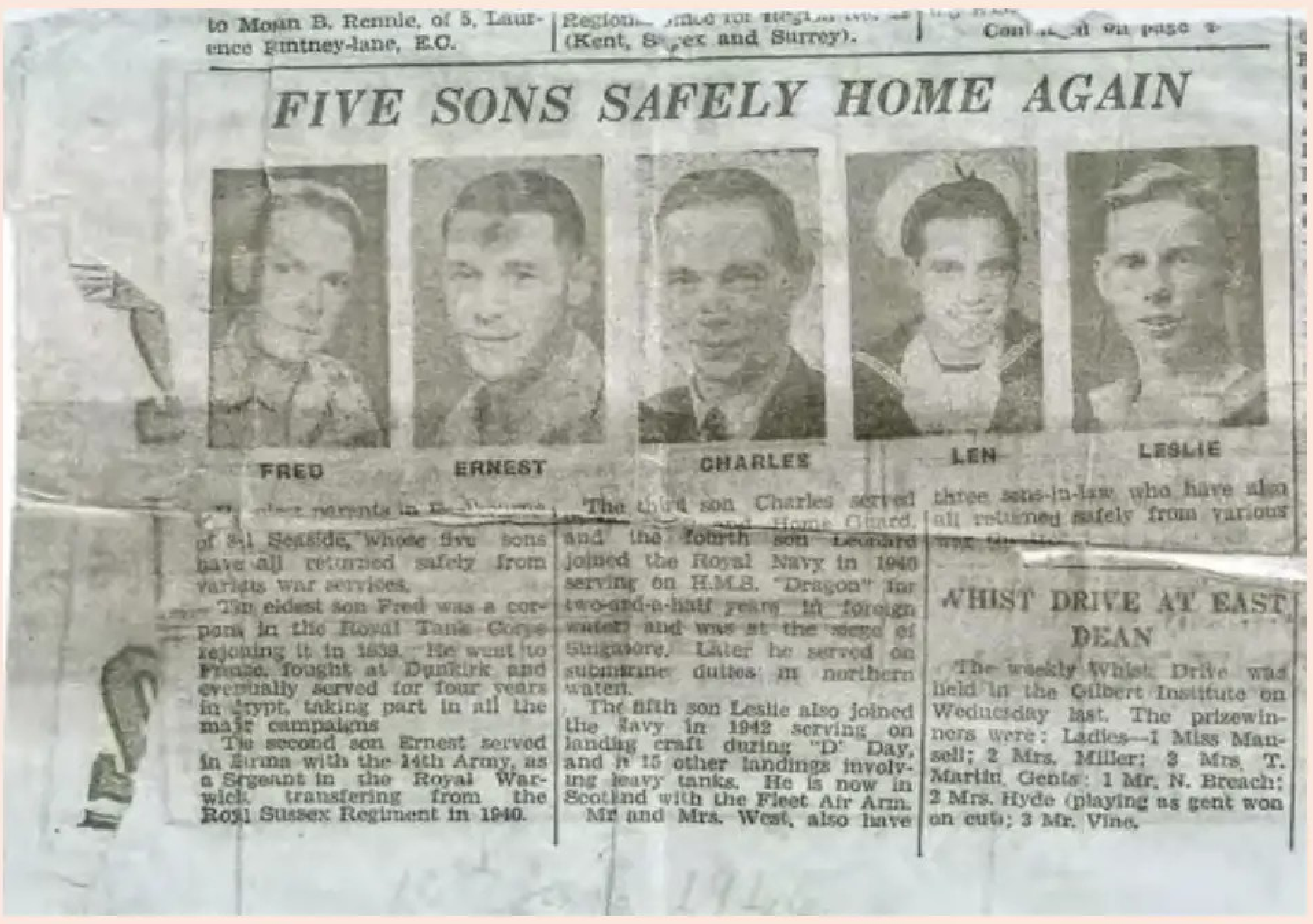
The West's go eight for eight



to Moan B. Rennie, of 5, Laurence Pintney-lane, E.C.

Region[illegible] (Kent, Sussex and Surrey).

Con[illegible] on page [illegible]

FIVE SONS SAFELY HOME AGAIN

FRED ERNEST CHARLES LEN LESLIE

[illegible] parents in [illegible] of [illegible] Seaside, whose five sons have all returned safely from various war services.

The eldest son Fred was a corporal in the Royal Tank Corps rejoining it in 1939. He went to France, fought at Dunkirk and eventually served for four years in Egypt, taking part in all the major campaigns.

The second son Ernest served in Burma with the 14th Army, as a Sergeant in the Royal Warwick, transfering from the Royal Sussex Regiment in 1940.

The third son Charles served [illegible] Home Guard, and the fourth son Leonard joined the Royal Navy in 1940 serving on H.M.S. "Dragon" for two-and-a-half years in foreign waters and was at the siege of Singapore. Later he served on submarine duties in northern waters.

The fifth son Leslie also joined the Navy in 1942 serving on landing craft during "D" Day, and in 15 other landings involving heavy tanks. He is now in Scotland with the Fleet Air Arm.

Mr and Mrs. West, also have three sons-in-law who have also all returned safely from various war [illegible]

WHIST DRIVE AT EAST DEAN

The weekly Whist Drive was held in the Gilbert Institute on Wednesday last. The prizewinners were: Ladies—1 Miss Mansell; 2 Mrs. Miller; 3 Mrs. T. Martin. Gents: 1 Mr. N. Breach; 2 Mrs. Hyde (playing as gent won on cut); 3 Mr. Vine.

1946

Those wishing to put a face to Stoker Leonard West, the eyewitness to the loss of HMS *Hood* (*A view from the prince*, *BAW*, September 2025) will be delighted to know that West’s son, Mike, recently discovered a faded newspaper cutting in the family archive, as well as a letter to Leonard from his mate who was serving on *Hood*.

The cutting is from the *Eastbourne Gazette*, dated June 16, 1946, and titled *Five Sons Safely Home Again*. Fred West served in the Royal Tank Corps in France and Egypt, Ernest with the Royal Sussex Regiment in Burma, Charles in the Home Guard and Leonard, as we know, served on HMS *Prince of Wales*, but also HMS *Dragon*. He also witnessed the Battle of Singapore and later served on submarines. Leslie operated landing craft on D-Day and in other major landings before joining the Fleet Air Arm.

Each of the family’s three sons-in-law also safely returned home from their wartime duties. No wonder the newspaper article describes the West family as the “happiest parents in Eastbourne”. Leonard West is pictured second right.

Richard Parker/Mike West

A happy Rhodesian!

Having finished the August 2025 VJ Day special issue of the magazine, I wanted to say well done. It really was outstanding, in particular *The Empire Roll Call*.

For decades – especially since 1965, when Rhodesia’s unilateral political severance from Britain soured matters – the erstwhile colony’s contribution to Britain’s war effort in both world wars has been acknowledged and remembered by very few. In World War One, the 1st Rhodesia Regiment played a key role in the defeat of German forces in Deutsch-Südwestafrika, and in East Africa it was the 2nd Rhodesia Regiment and the 1st and 2nd Rhodesian Native Regiment that fought and died for the Empire. Almost 2,500 Rhodesians went on to serve in no fewer than 160 British/South African regiments in Western Europe.

As you point out, in World War Two, Rhodesians in the RAF, Royal Navy and in numerous British/South African brigades served in East and North Africa, Italy, India and Burma. All-Rhodesian units included the Rhodesian African Rifles, the Rhodesian Armoured Car Regiment and the Southern Rhodesia Artillery.

In addition, Rhodesians served with distinction in the Long Range Desert Group and the SAS, plus, as mentioned, there was the vital contribution of the Rhodesian Air Training Group, while the colony’s contribution to the RAF was acknowledged by including the name ‘Rhodesia’ in Nos. 44, 237 and 266 Squadrons.

It was a fantastic ‘Mention in Despatches’, remembering Rhodesia’s unfailing support, pro rata more than any other Commonwealth country. However, referring to ‘South’ and ‘North’ Rhodesia is unfortunate. The two territories were Southern Rhodesia and Northern Rhodesia. Former Rhodesians and today’s Zimbabweans will immediately pick up on the error!

Gerry van Tonder

Fieldhouse in the field

Having enjoyed reading *Drilling for doomsday* by Robbie McGuire (*BAW*, September 2025), I realised that the ‘naval officer’ shown filming part of the 1985 Exercise Brave Defender was actually Admiral of the Fleet Sir John Fieldhouse, who was Chief of the Defence Staff at that point.

I participated in Brave Defender, but sadly have little recollection of any significant events. I think that was the exercise where they trailed the BBC emergency news service. Each day a video was issued purporting to be a news programme giving details of the emerging situation (or as much as the public would be given). I remember most of us stopped watching it after a couple of days, being more concerned with our own tasks.

Fieldhouse was quite a character. I recall him chairing a meeting at Portsmouth after his retirement that was the most efficient I have ever seen, but all done with that slightly cheeky grin you see in the photograph.

Bill Black

A swing and a miss

Our thanks to **Major (ret’d) Keith Child**, **Malcolm Barrett** and **David Malcolm**, who spotted a gaffe in *BAW*’s September 2025 issue. On page three, we captioned a photograph showing General Bill Slim and a Gurkha examining a ‘kukri’ knife. The bladed article is actually a Japanese military sword. Oops!

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Rescue or Recce?

Suspicions that Luftwaffe rescue aircraft were engaged in reconnaissance work resulted in the controversial decision by the RAF to shoot them down. **Andrew Thomas** explains

D-A GIO
D-A GIO
MW
N9888

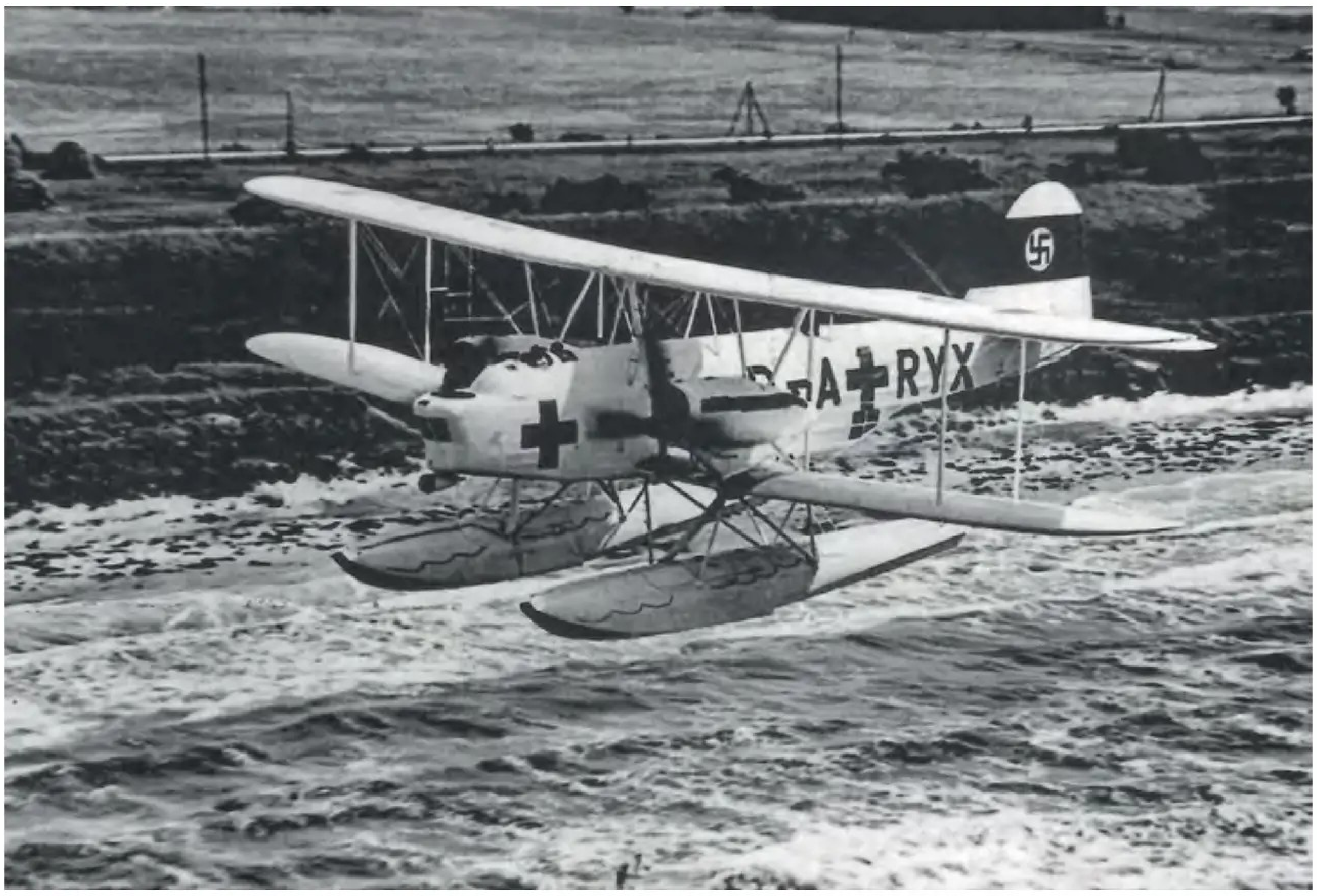
Artist's impression showing the combat between Flight Sergeant Nelson Webb's Anson and He 59C D-AGIO ANTONIS KARIDIS

At the start of the Battle of Britain, in marked contrast to the RAF, the Luftwaffe had a well-established organisation tasked with the recovery of aircrew from the sea, with the Seenotdeinst (Sea Rescue Service) comprising Staffeln of seaplanes and flotillas of rescue boats backed up by dedicated communications centres.

The main aircraft used was the Heinkel He 59, a twin-engine biplane seaplane, that first flew in 1931. These made regular patrols from bases along the German coast, but following the German conquest of Western Europe, operational rescue Staffeln – known as Seenotflugkommando – were detached to bases in France and the Netherlands to cover operations against Britain. At the 'official' beginning of the Battle of Britain, the five Seenotflugkommando had 33 He 59s and a single Do 24 (a tri-motor floatplane) on strength.

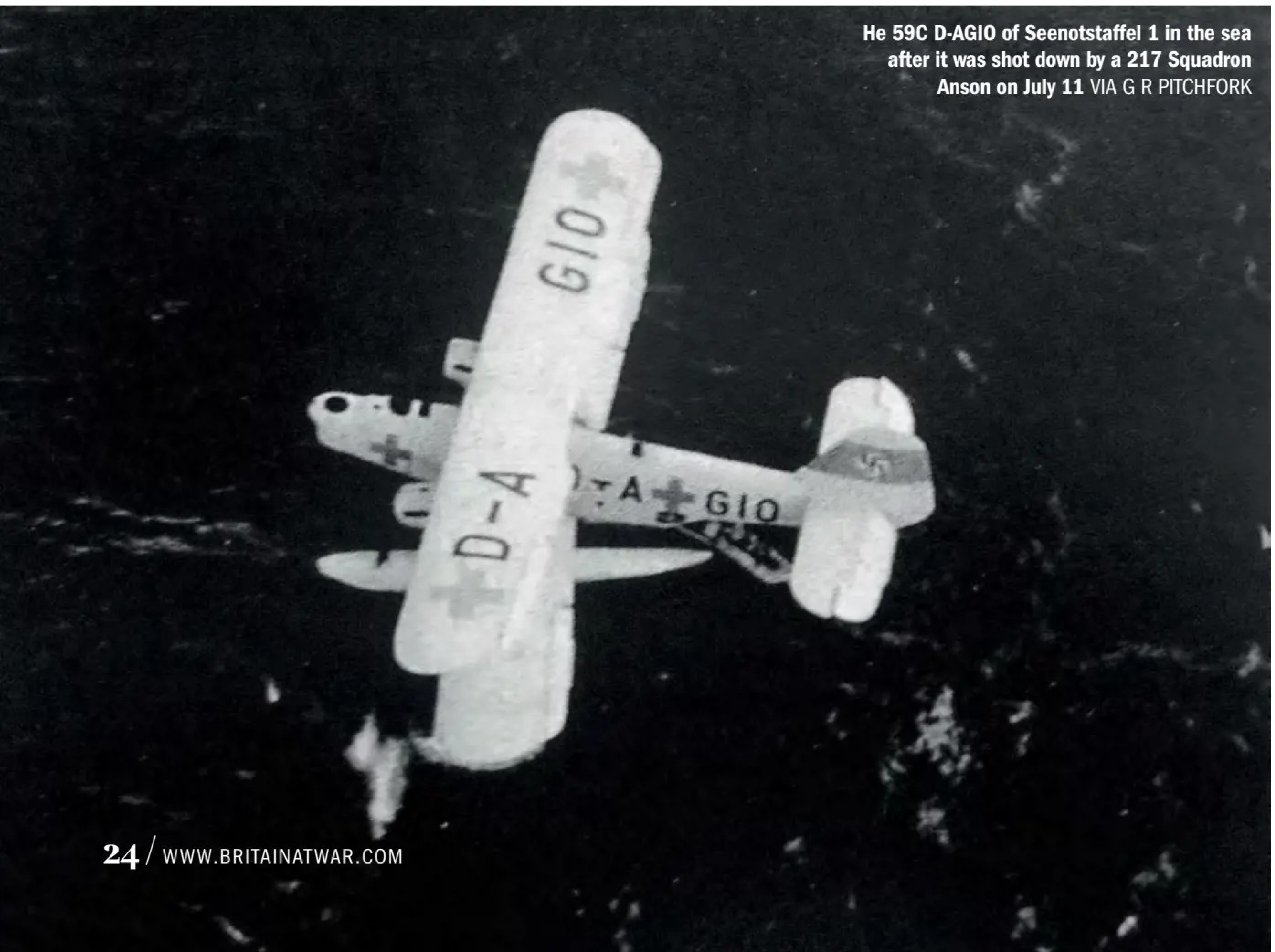
Although obsolescent, the He 59 had good seagoing qualities and was available in substantial numbers. Accordingly, it was the backbone of the Seenotdeinst. As operations spread into the southern North Sea, the Heinkels were painted white overall and carried prominent civilian registrations. They also wore red crosses on the wings and fuselage in anticipation of being given immunity from attack.

In contrast, there were no equivalent RAF units. In August, operational control of rescue launches passed to local naval control and a dozen Lysanders were allocated to Fighter Command to search for ditched



This Heinkel He 59B-3, Wk.Nr 1314 D-ARYX, was the prototype search-and-rescue conversion and reached Seenotflugkommando 2 on August 1, 1940 VIA ALFRED PRICE

The first He 59 lost off the British coast fell victim to Spitfires of 72 Squadron on July 1 VIA J D R RAWLINGS



He 59C D-AGIO of Seenotstaffel 1 in the sea after it was shot down by a 217 Squadron Anson on July 11 VIA G R PITCHFORK

> *"There were two fighters behind us a few minutes later, and very quickly we were shot down. Our aircraft was painted white with big red crosses. According to international agreements, we carried no armament"*
>
> LEUTNANT HANS-JOACHIM FEHSKE,
> SEENOTFLUGKOMMANDO 3

aircrew, but a dedicated Air Sea Rescue unit was not established until 1941.

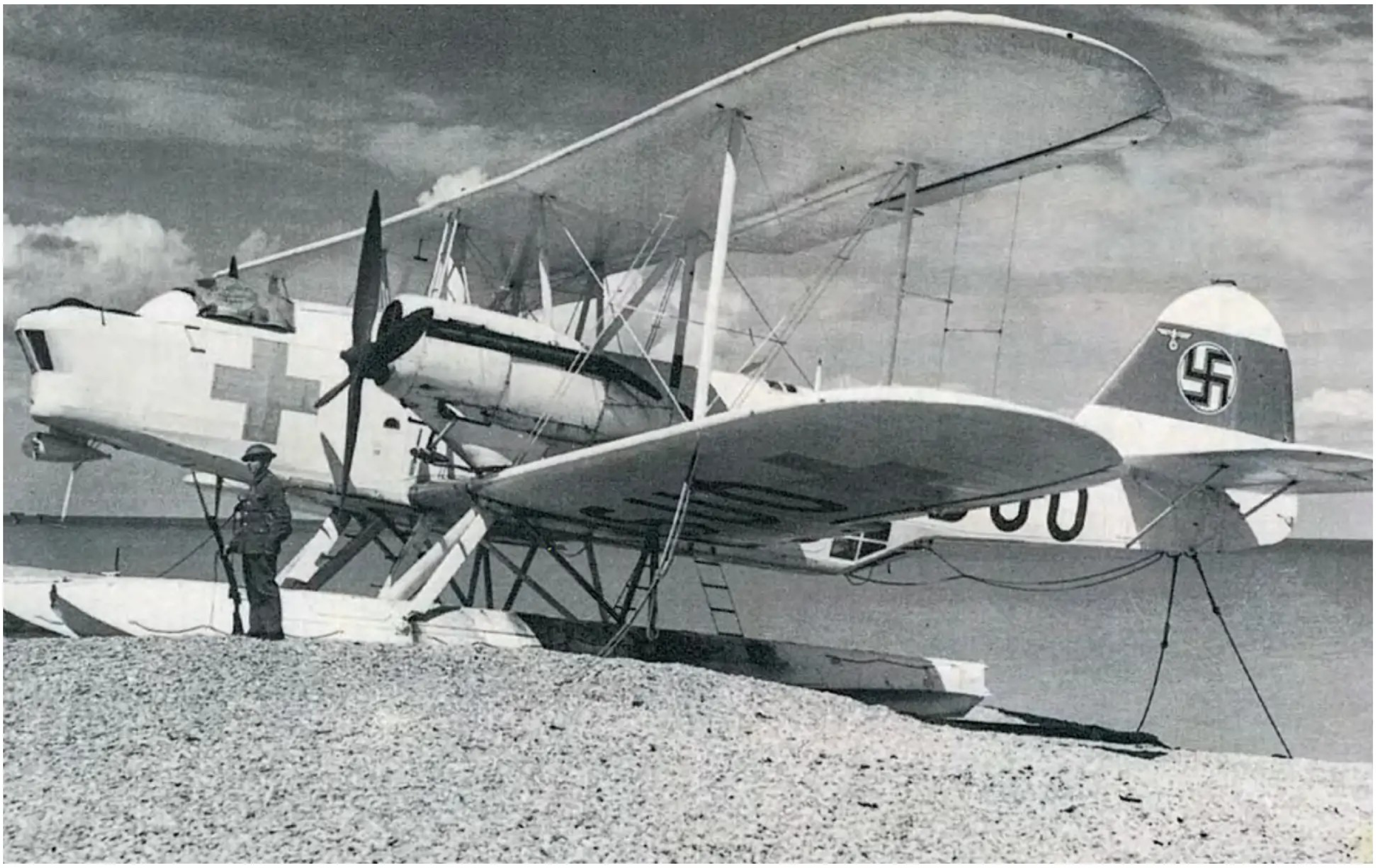
Early engagement

In the early hours of July 1, 1940, Leutnant zur See Schroeder of 3/KüFlGr 106 was forced to land his He 115 seaplane 'M2+CL' during a minelaying sortie. Ditching off Whitby, He 59D D-ASAM of Seenotflugkommando 3 was sent from Schellingwoude, in the Netherlands, to search for the stricken crew.

Seenotdeinst HQ regarded the rescue effort as a hazardous sortie. Commanded by Leutnant Hans-Joachim Fehske, the Heinkel arrived in the search area soon after dawn, encountering mist. This soon lifted, and in excellent visibility the searchers turned south, unaware they had been detected and that a section of Spitfires had scrambled. Led by Flight Lieutenant Ted Graham, Flying Officer Edgar Wilcox and Flight Sergeant Jack Steere of 'B' Flight, 72 Squadron, took off from Acklington and shortly after 0600hrs, spotted the intruder off Hartlepool.

The He 59 was flying at 500ft and was found near a coastal convoy. The Spitfires were also seen by the German crew as Fehske, the observer, remembered: "One can understand that the RAF did not like that. There were two fighters behind us a few minutes later, and very quickly we were shot down. Our aircraft was painted white with big red crosses. According to international agreements, we carried no armament on our search and rescue plane."

The Spitfires hit the floats and injured the radio operator, Unteroffizier Stuckmann, and the Heinkel ditched. The crew took to their dinghy and were picked up by the sloop HMS *Black Swan*. Edgar recalled that the combat that has been regarded as the first blood of the Battle of Britain, although the 'official' date of the start was not until ten days later: "I delivered one attack and fired a burst of four seconds from dead astern. I observed incendiary bullets going into enemy aircraft. I saw it jettison small objects that I thought were small bombs.



Proof that He 59s marked with the red cross were also reconnoitring shipping movements came when documents were secured from the He 59C-2 D-ASUO, which beached in Kent after being forced down by Pilot Officer Allen on July 9 VIA J SCUTTS

The crew of He 59E, Wk Nr 2606 D-AFFK, of Seenotflugddko 4 spent an uncomfortable night on the wing of their aircraft awaiting rescue after being shot down on August 15 VIA CHRIS GOSS

"I then delivered a second attack and was just opening fire when it touched down on the water. I continued circling the enemy aircraft as it settled on water and started to sink. Dinghy was launched with three occupants. I clearly saw red crosses on the upper surfaces of the top planes and the letters D-ASAM. A black Swastika on a red background was on the rudder."

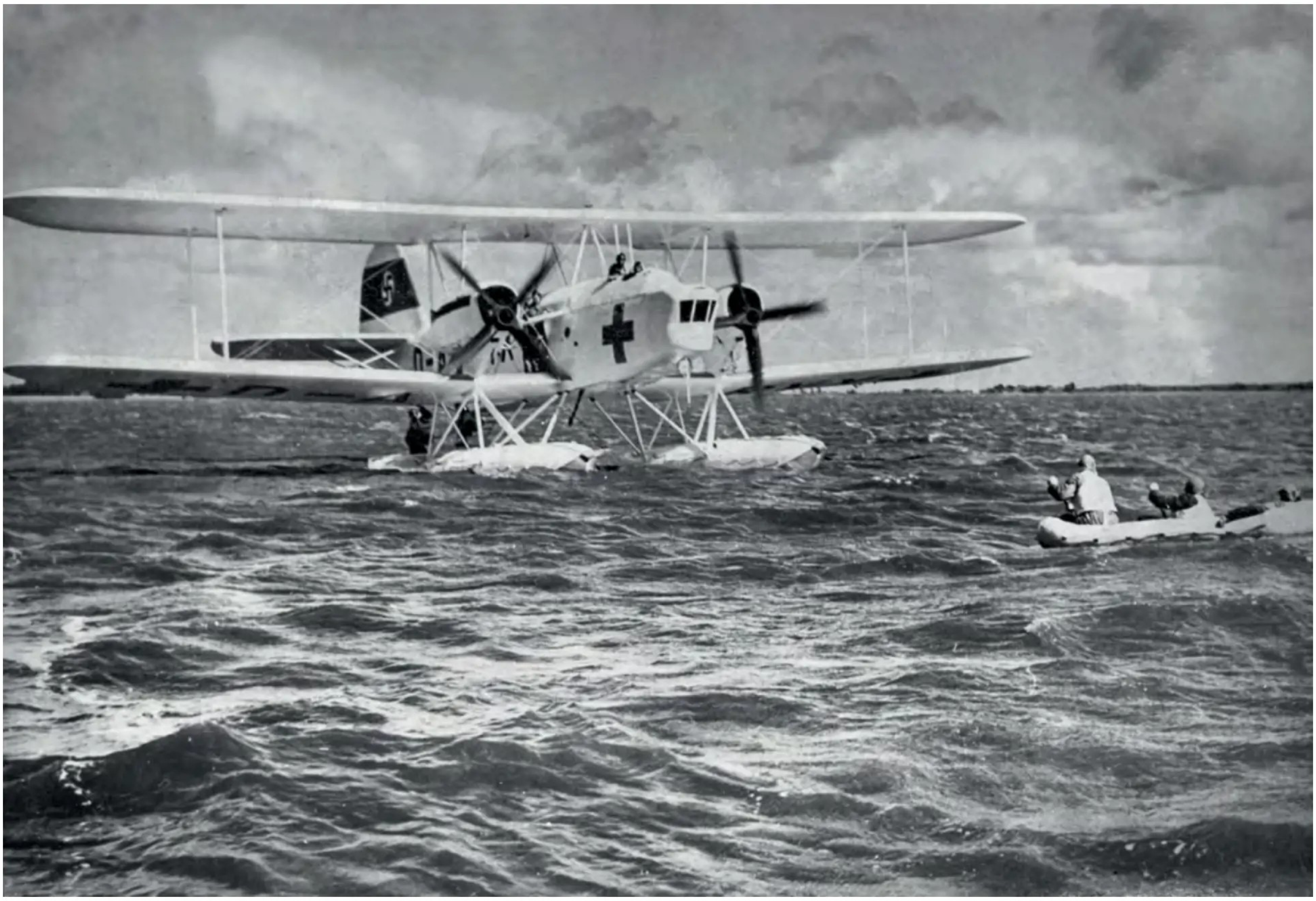
Avoidance of doubt

Despite Fehske's protestations, there were genuine suspicions that the Heinkel was complicit in military activity by reporting shipping movements. Even reconnaissance would flout the aircraft's red cross markings and void its protections. If there were uncertainties on the British side, they were quickly allayed. On the evening of July 9, bombers from Luftflotte 2 flying with Bf 110s of III./Zerstörergeschwader 26 mounted a heavy attack on a convoy as it transited the Channel. However, six aircraft went missing.

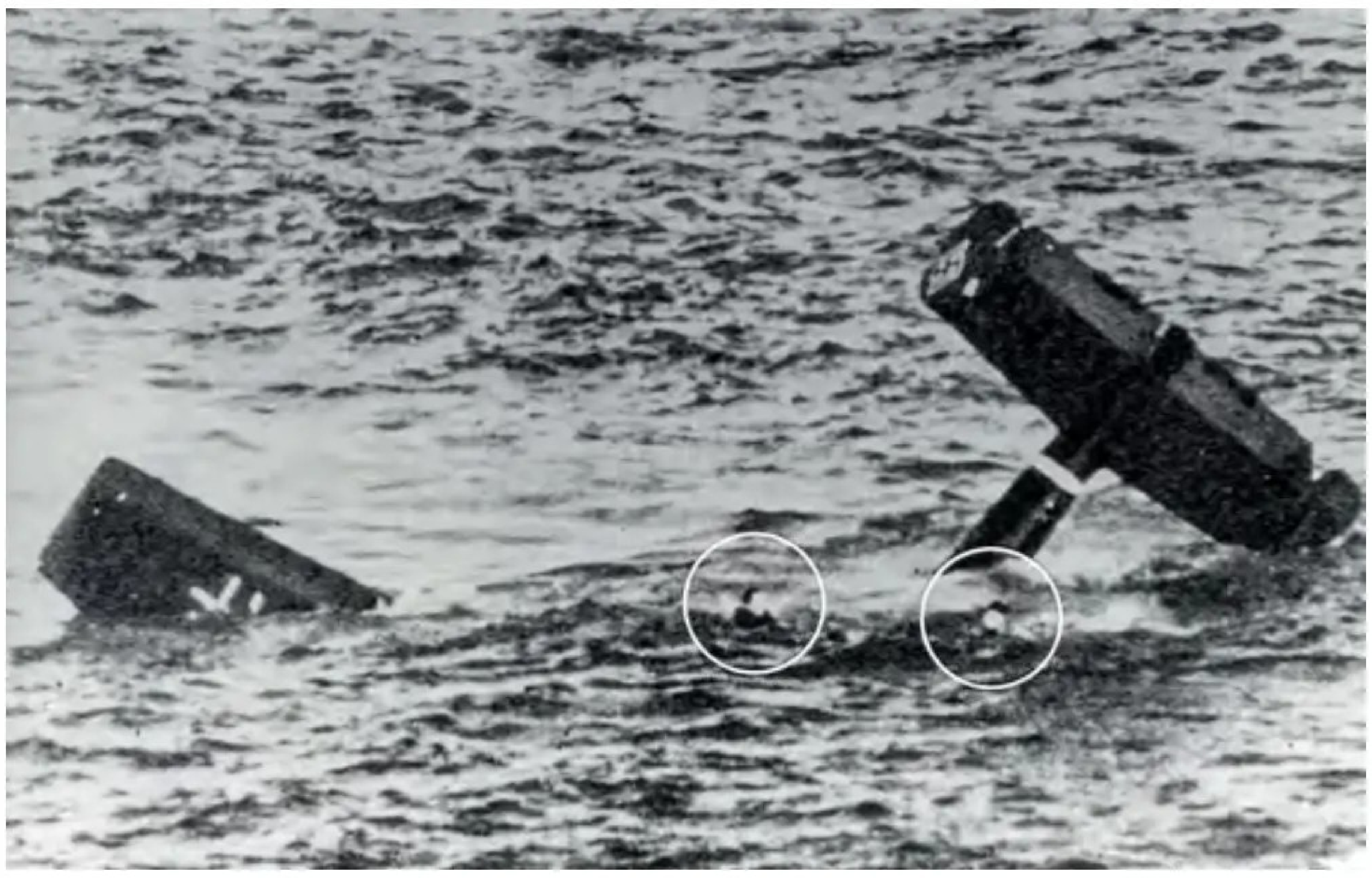
Several He 59s of Seenotflugkdo 1 launched with an escort of Bf 109s from II./JG 51 to search for the missing crews. The convoy was covered by a section of Spitfires from 54 Squadron led by Flight Lieutenant Al Deere and when He 59C-2 D-ASUO ventured too close, Pilot Officer Johnny Allen peeled off to attack the seaplane, which force-landed onto the Goodwin Sands just south of Deal in Kent. It was Allen's seventh and last victory, as he was killed later in the month.

The German crew, Feldwebel Maywald and Unteroffiziers Andres, Schiele and Bartmann were captured, and their red cross-marked seaplane was towed ashore and beached at Deal. There, when it was examined, it was discovered the pilot's log showed that he had noted the positions and direction of British convoys. This was assessed as reconnaissance and reinforced the suspicion that the role of the German seaplanes was not purely humanitarian.

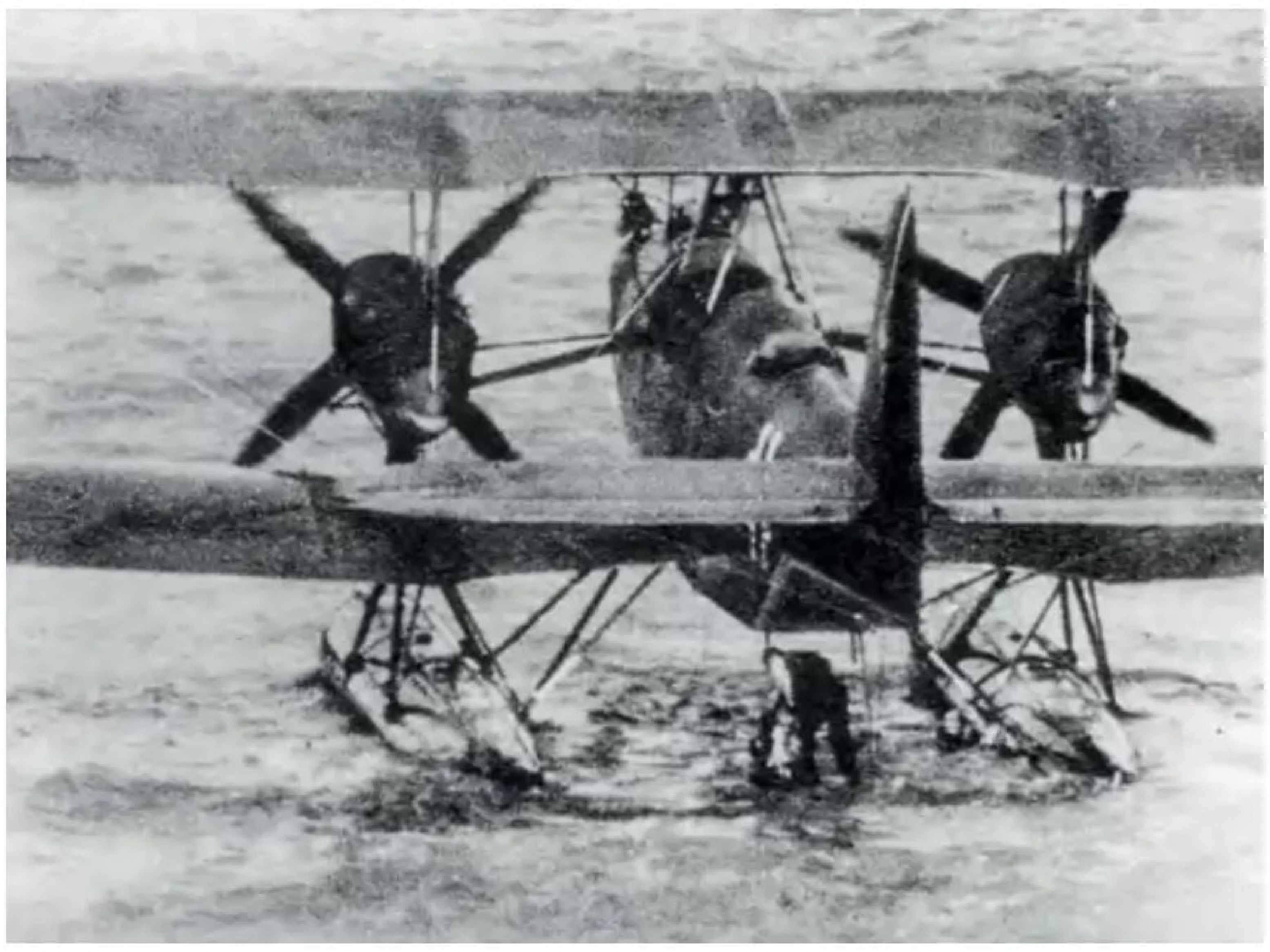
Accordingly, the implications were considered. Sir Hugh Dowding was in no doubt and considered that military aircraft rescuing downed airmen could not legitimately be marked with a red cross. Indeed, the 1929 Geneva Conventions were quite specific: "Aircraft used as means of medical transport shall enjoy the protection of the Convention during the period in which they are reserved exclusively for the evacuation of wounded and sick and the transport of medical personnel and material. In the absence of special and



A red cross-marked He 59 conducts a simulated rescue for the cameras in early 1940. In reality, crews had to brave much rougher seas during Channel rescues VIA J WEAL



This Messerschmitt Bf 110C, thought to be of III./ZG 76, ditched in the English Channel on September 25, 1940, probably after combat with 607 Squadron south of the Isle of Wight...



...the crew had a fair expectation of rescue and, as shown, were picked up by an He 59 VIA J WEAL

express permission, flying over the firing line, and over the zone situated in front of clearing or dressing stations, and generally over all enemy territory or territory occupied by the enemy, is prohibited."

While the detail of the intelligence gleaned from the capture of D-ASUO was assessed, there was a further incident on July 11. An Anson of 217 Squadron from St Eval, flown by Flight Sergeant Nelson Webb and crew, encountered an He 59 wearing red crosses and the civil registration D-AGIO 20 miles south of Start Point, Devon. The Heinkel was close to the convoy the Anson was escorting, and shortly after 1000hrs, Webb's crew attacked and both gunners – Pilot Officer Swift and Sergeant Botha – opened up with their machine guns, firing a considerable amount of .303 ammunition and forcing the Heinkel onto the sea. The wireless operator, Aircraftman Holiday, sent off a sighting message just as the Germans took to their life raft. A destroyer picked them up, and Nelson Webb received the DFM soon afterwards.

Shoot to kill

Three days later, after careful consideration of the evidence secured over the preceding weeks, RAF communiqué No.1254 was issued. It was clear, stating: "Luftwaffe aircraft bearing civil markings and marked with the red cross have recently flown over British ships at sea and in the vicinity of the British coast, and they are being employed for purposes which His Majesty's Government cannot regard as being consistent with the privileges generally accorded to the red cross.

In addition to He 59s, the Seenotdeinst employed fast launches as part of its well-equipped organisation VIA J WEAL

Hurricane Mk.Is of 238 Squadron at Middle Wallop were in action against He 59s over Convoy Peewit on August 8 VIA R C B ASHWORTH

> *“His Majesty’s Government are unable, however, to grant immunity to such aircraft flying over areas in which operations are in progress on land or at sea. Ambulance aircraft which do not comply will do so at their own risk and peril”*
>
> RAF communiqué No.1254

“His Majesty’s Government desire to accord to ambulance aircraft reasonable facilities for the transportation of the sick and wounded, in accordance with the Red Cross Convention, and aircraft engaged in the direct evacuation of the sick and wounded will be respected, provided that they comply with the relevant provisions of the Convention. His Majesty’s Government are unable, however, to grant immunity to such aircraft flying over areas in which operations are in progress on land or at sea, or approaching British or Allied territory, or territory in British occupation, or British or Allied ships. Ambulance aircraft which do not comply with the above requirements will do so at their own risk and peril.”

If the official stance was in any way in doubt, the sentiment was reinforced by an Air Ministry statement on July 29 pronouncing that the tasks conducted by the air-sea rescue aircraft “was not consistent with the privileges generally accorded to the red cross.”

The Germans vehemently protested on the basis that rescue aircraft were covered by the Geneva Convention. With his typical bellicosity Prime Minister Winston Churchill responded: “We did not recognise this means of rescuing enemy pilots who had been shot down in action, in order that they might come and bomb our civil population again.”

Attacks on civilian-marked rescue aircraft continued, particularly if they were in the vicinity of Allied shipping. As a result, the Seenotdienst eventually ordered that its rescue aircraft be armed and camouflaged, and the civil registrations and red cross markings abandoned.

By now, the Heinkels had been supplemented by two ex-Dutch Navy Dornier Do 24Ns, D-AEAV and D-APDA, which joined Seenotflugkdo 1. These too were later armed and camouflaged.

The RAF was quick to implement its approved policy and at 1500hrs on July 20, Hurricanes of 238 Squadron, when escorting a convoy south of the Needles, encountered an He 59 at 1,500ft. Pilot Officer Jack Urwin-Mann wrote: “I saw a completely white aeroplane seven miles south of the convoy and went to investigate. I identified the aircraft as an He 59 and dived to attack, making the first from astern and above. The starboard engine completely stopped with the propeller still. The enemy aircraft was then dead on the waterline about three miles from the French coast. The long burst seemed to go right through it, as I had fired ahead of it from quarter deflection and he ran right into it. The aircraft looked completely white with black crosses on [the] fuselage and main planes and entire rudder.”

Though claimed as a ‘probable’, the Seenotflugkdo 4 aircraft and crew were lost and the body of its pilot, Feldwebel Herbert Degel, washed ashore in France a month later.

However, Fighter Command did not have it entirely its own way. Just three hours after Urwin-Mann’s claim, fighters defending Convoy Bosom, as it sailed east under steady attack, shot down a number of enemy aircraft, resulting in the Germans mounting searches. Flying near the convoy at 1800hrs, Flying Officer Joseph Haworth of 43 Squadron spotted an He 59 south of the Needles. He dived to attack, but the now-armed Heinkel’s gunner saw him approach and hit the Hurricane, forcing Haworth to bale out and he drowned.

A little over an hour later, Hurricanes from 601 Squadron flown by Flying Officer Tom Hubbard and Pilot Officers Michael Doulton and Tom Grier encountered an He 59N of SeenotflugKdo 1 some 25 miles south of Selsey Bill. Hubbard was the first to dive: “I sighted a white object close to water, ten miles south of convoy at 1920hrs. On investigation it turned out to be a Heinkel 59 painted white with red

After the RAF issued its controversial communiqué in July 1940, the He 59s were camouflaged and armed H RING VIA C F SHORES

Blenheim Mk.If, L6728/NG-N, of 604 Squadron shared the destruction of a He 59 on August 11, a first victory for Pilot Officer Edward Crew, who later became a renowned night-fighter pilot and retired as an Air Vice Marshal M J F BOWYER

crosses and other markings flying south at 120mph at 100ft. I circled the machine, at which it turned toward me, and I radioed a description to the controller who instructed me to shoot it down if hostile."

They attempted to force the biplane toward the English coast, but when it turned south Hubbard "fired a further burst (making 2,000 rounds in all) and watched while Green 2 and 3 shot the machine down in flames. No return fire was experienced and burning oil were the only remains on the water, position 30 miles south of Selsey Bill. We landed at 1940hrs having taken off at 1805hrs."

The Germans were seen to leave the aircraft but were too low for the parachutes to open. Thereafter, the Luftwaffe directed that, whenever possible, rescue flights were to be given a fighter escort.

Not so easy pickings

The Seenotdeinst aircraft were unmolested until July 27, when a patrol of Hurricanes from 615 Squadron was landing at RAF Hawkinge after covering Convoy Bacon through a series of storms. However, as the fighters were about to touch down, they were diverted to investigate an aircraft sighting off Deal.

The contact proved to be a Seenotflugkdo 3 He 59, just above the water ten miles northeast of Dover. Squadron Leader Joe Kayll led six Hurricanes down on the hapless seaplane as the unit's records describe: "Flying Officer Collard and Pilot Officer Madle attacked, and the rear gunner of the enemy aircraft fired at them. After attack, some smoke came from the enemy. It took evasive action by diving and turning from 500ft to sea level. Red 1 [Kayll] then attacked from dead astern closing to 100 yards, the enemy burst into flames and Red 2 [Pilot Officer Hugo] had one burst into the aircraft which crashed into the sea."

On July 28, a large raid was detected approaching Dover in the early afternoon, resulting in several sharp dogfights between Bf 109s of JG 51 and the Spitfires of 74 Squadron. Subsequently He 59s were sent across and, at 1505hrs, 111 Squadron's Pilot Officer Robert Wilson spotted He 59N D-ASUC of Seenotflugkdo 3, which he attacked with Sergeant Jim Robertson, forcing it down west of Boulogne. Two of its crew were killed and three wounded. Fifteen minutes later, the squadron spotted another Heinkel, D-AROO, apparently rescuing the survivors of the ditched aircraft. This too was attacked and damaged, although survivors from both aircraft were rescued.

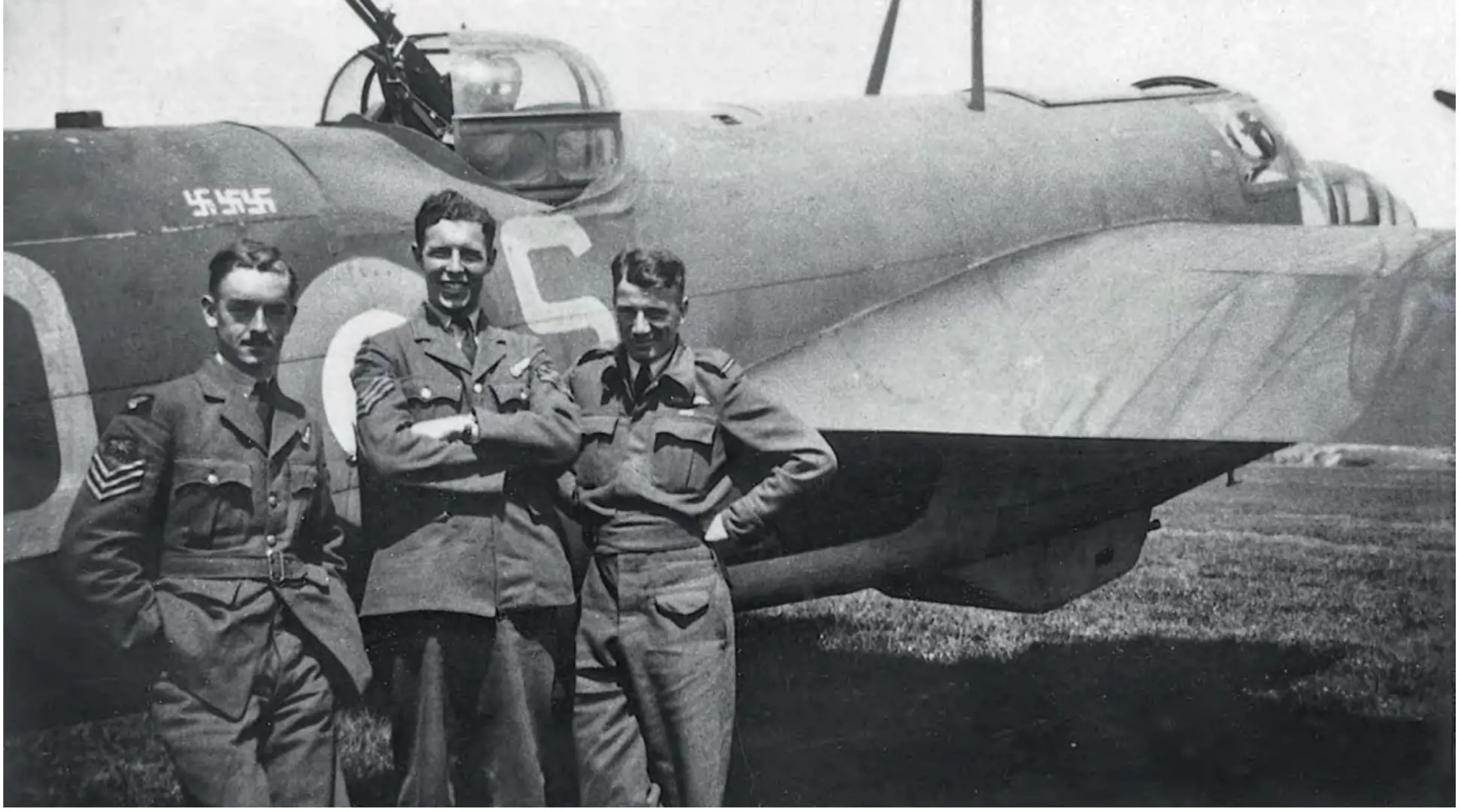
On July 30, Seenotflugkdo 3 was ordered to move to Boulogne to support the forthcoming air assault on England. They and other rescue units based in Cherbourg, continued to operate in conjunction with rescue launches. In the afternoon of August 8, during the battles over Convoy Peewit, both the RAF and Luftwaffe suffered losses. These included two Hurricanes of 238 Squadron based at Middle Wallop, from where the unit's CO, Squadron Leader Harold Fenton, took off to search for them. Flying over a sea littered with oil and debris, at 1350hrs he spotted an He 59 low over the water and dived on it: "I spotted a German at sea level. I went down to attack, gave him a long burst but being much faster, I overshot. His gunner must have got in a lucky one that cut an oil pipe. My windscreen was covered in oil. I turned north but my engine seized. Having so little height, I had to ditch rather than bale out." He managed to ditch near the trawler *Basset*, which picked him up.

Downed twice in a day

Seenotflugkommando He 59s suffered further losses on August 11, when the Luftwaffe returned to battle in force. One left Calais and had barely set out when it was spotted by Spitfires of 610 Squadron, with Flight Lieutenant Brian Smith diving in and shooting it down. However, the Bf 109 escort intervened and Sergeants Tanner and Neville were killed.

Meanwhile, the station commander at Middle Wallop had launched two Blenheim Mk.IFs of 604 Squadron, flown by Squadron Leader Anderson and Pilot Officer Crew, with an escort of Spitfires from 152 Squadron to search for his missing aircraft – their use highly indicative of the ad hoc nature of RAF air-sea rescue in 1940. When 30 miles off the French coast, Crew recalled: "We were on an air-sea rescue search. We were then detached to investigate a report of an enemy seaplane and found it to be an He 59 in the sea with engines running. We dived down and opened up, setting it on fire. In the area there were two small German ships."

Seenotdeinst seaplanes were active over the North Sea too. On August 15 – the so-called Adler Tag – a He 111H of KG 26 was shot down by fighters and ditched



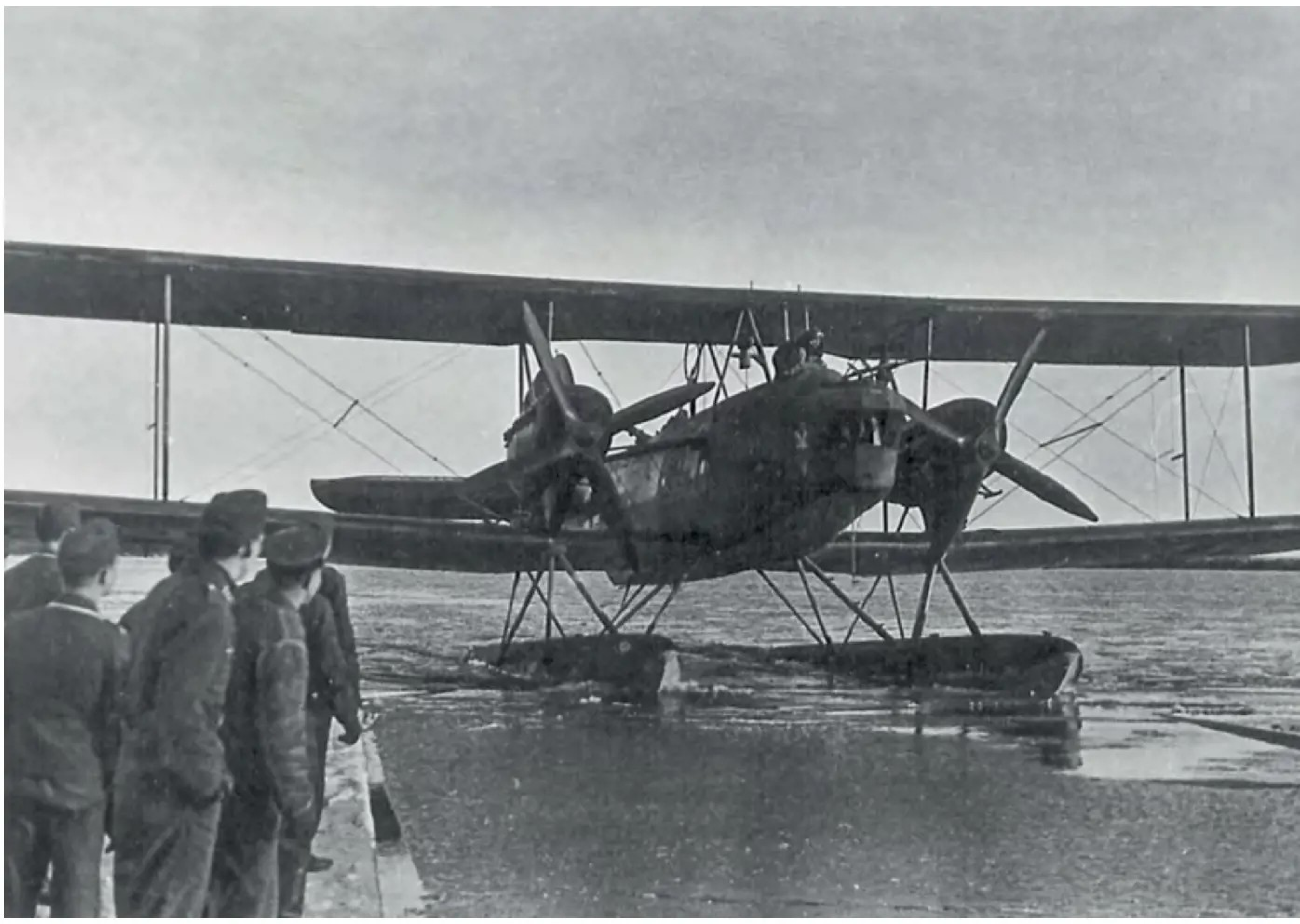
One of the swastikas under the gunner's position on this 236 Squadron Blenheim Mk.IVf represents a Breguet Bizerte flying boat shot down by Pilot Officer Graham Russell (right) and his gunner, Sergeant Eric Pert (left) on November 6. The observer in the centre is Sergeant Ken Hutchings. The successful sortie was Pert's first operational flight E PERT

off Durham. Patrolling the coast was a He 59E of Seenotflugkdo 4, which landed and picked up the crew. However, on its way back to base, the seaplane was spotted by a Hudson Mk.I of 206 Squadron and shot down, killing Leutnant zur See Siegfried Bömer. The survivors climbed onto the wing to prevent the seaplane from overturning in the rough sea. During the attempted rescue, a Do 24N was badly damaged and rendered unable to take off, leaving the stricken crews to a cold, uncomfortable night before a Kriegsmarine minesweeper arrived. Even then, the ship had to wait for the Heinkel to drift from a minefield before it could attempt to tow it.

Further south, the stream of attacks persisted and rescue patrols continued, but one ran into trouble on August 26 after He 111s of KG 55 attacked Portsmouth. The bombers were repulsed with heavy losses and He 59s of Seenotflugkdo 2 were despatched to find the missing crews. At 1915hrs, a He 59 was spotted south of St Catherine's Point at about 20ft by two 602 Squadron Spitfires flown by Flying Officer Donald Jack and Pilot Officer Paul Webb. The unit history described the action: "This time their target was interesting. They found it, low over the water, 20 miles south of St Catherine's Point: a He 59 floatplane. The ponderous, obsolete He

> *"I spotted a German at sea level. I went down to attack, gave him a long burst but being much faster, I overshot. His gunner must have got in a lucky one that cut an oil pipe"*
>
> Squadron Leader Harold Fenton, CO 238 Squadron

Squadron Leader Harold Fenton, 238 Squadron's CO, survived being shot down as he attacked an He 59 on August 8 while he searched for two of his missing pilots VIA M GOODMAN



An He 59 on the slipway at Schellingwoude near Amsterdam, one of a number of detachments based along the coasts of the Netherlands and France H RING VIA C F SHORES

> *"He 59s reported on shipping positions and coastal installations, and they were escorted by Messerschmitts – which were definitely not on errands of mercy"*
>
> 602 Squadron records

59s were used by the Luftwaffe to rescue downed airmen. Further up the coast they flew in silver, with red crosses prominent – down in 602's sector, though, they were in full camouflage. They reported on shipping and coastal installations, and they were escorted by Messerschmitts, which were definitely not on errands of mercy. In a fast attack, Paul Webb put the Heinkel down for good, and the two Spitfires made good their escape before the 109s could pounce."

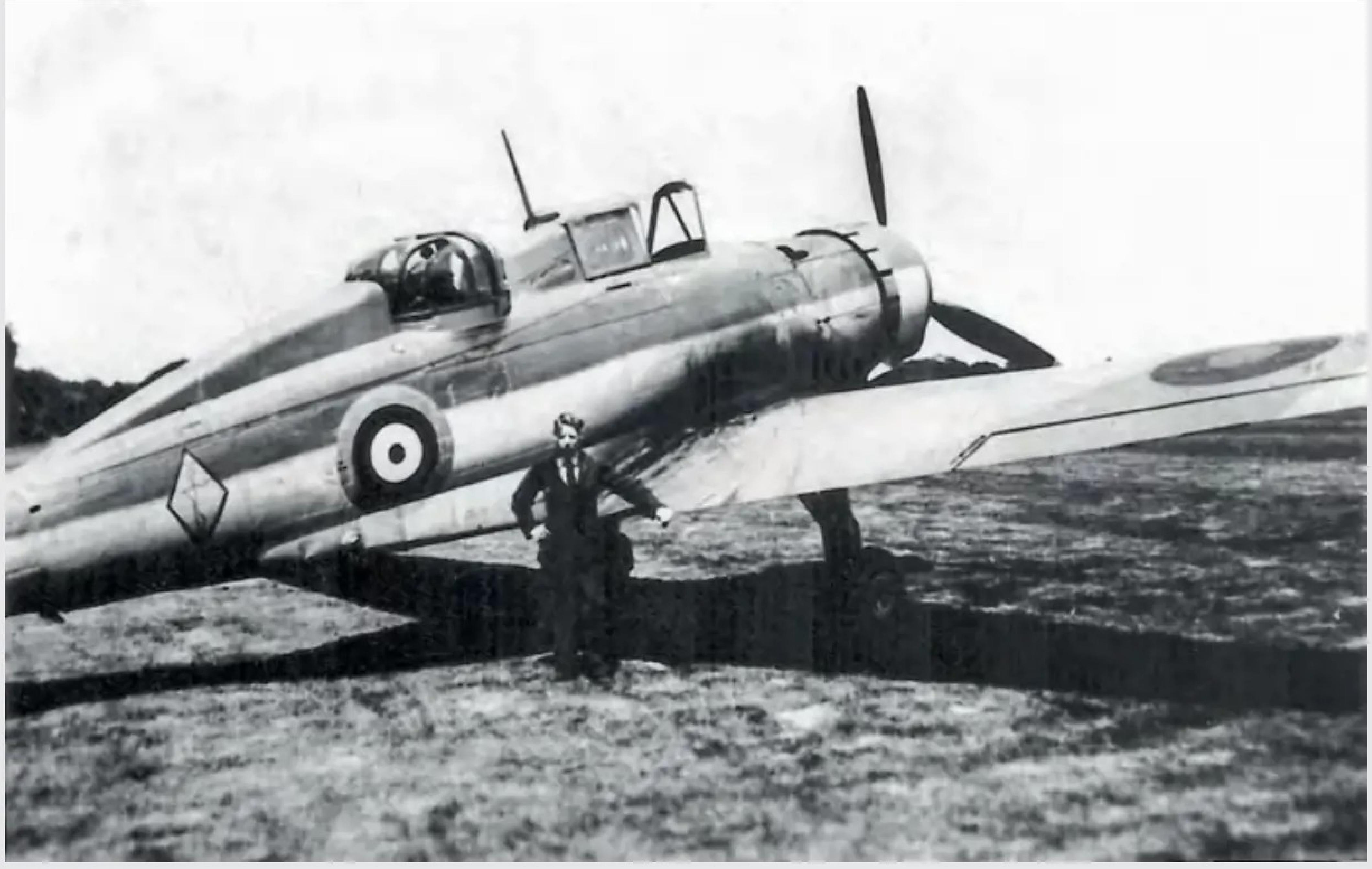
Before the month was out, two more He 59s fell to RAF fighters. In the late morning of August 28, Flight Lieutenant Rupert Clerk in a 79 Squadron Hurricane downed one in the Channel, wounding the crew. Minutes later, a 79 Squadron quartet led by Pilot Officer George Nelson-Edwards despatched another.

The Battle of Britain raged into September and so rescue sorties continued. The crew of a Do 18 flying boat of 3/KuFlgGr 406 was picked up on September 3, but four days later came the first major attack on London. Following this, He 59 DA+WT of Seenotflugkdo 3 landed off Dungeness to conduct a rescue but was wrecked by the swell. A week later another He 59, having rescued a pilot from the Channel, had to force-land near Boulogne and was also lost in the waves. In both cases, those aboard were saved.

Flight Lieutenant Rupert Clerke of 79 Squadron downed an He 59 on August 28 VIA M POSTLETHWAITE

RAF fighters and rough seas were not the only hazards confronting the He 59s. On October 2, a seaplane force-landed in a minefield and although its crew took to their dinghy, they struck a mine, killing four men. In the early hours of October 8, RAF intelligence picked up indications of a Luftwaffe aircraft in the Channel. At 0620hrs a trio of Blenheims from 235 Squadron were sent out and, in fog, two of them spotted Leutnant zur See Stelzner's He 59 of Seenotflugkdo 2, 18 miles southwest of St Catherine's Point. The Blenheims attacked, and Pilot Officer John Fenton recalled: "I fired again, from closer range at 150 yards. The rounds hit the engine."

BETWEEN A ROC AND A HARD PLACE



Pilot Officer 'Nobby' Clarke's unusual combat with a He 59 seaplane was flown in his personally marked Blackburn Roc turret fighter (serial L3085), which carried his distintive 'Saint' marking T BISHOP

In summer 1940, a number of Blackburn Roc turret fighters were transferred to the RAF, with some used by 2 Anti-Aircraft Co-operation Unit at Gosport, Hampshire, right in the front line. Among the pilots was Pilot Officer 'Nobby' Clarke and, following an attack by Ju 87 Stukas on Gosport airfield on August 18, the unit was ordered to disperse four Rocs with the turrets armed around the airfield for static anti-aircraft defence.

It took time to fully equip the Rocs with guns and radios but, by September 8, two were ready. The next day, L3085 was allocated to 21-year-old Clarke, who personalised his machine with a red 'Saint' in a red-framed yellow diamond on the fuselage. His Roc was declared operational on September 12 and, after every co-operation sortie, he harmonised the guns and trained for more warlike work.

On September 24, the Luftwaffe bombed the Spitfire factory at Woolston. Two days later, they returned with a large force of He 111s and the vital Supermarine works was extensively damaged. Several defending Hurricanes were lost off the Isle of Wight and there had been German losses too, so He 59s were soon out searching. At 1730hrs, 2 AACU was ordered to look for survivors 15 miles southwest of St Catherine's Point. Clarke, with Sergeant Hunt as gunner, was soon airborne.

In the evening gloom, Clarke spotted a seaplane in the distance. Seeing its camouflage and large black crosses, he realised it was German. As Clarke approached, the He 59's gunners opened fire and hit the Roc's port wing. Hunt responded with his four .303s, but as the Roc's guns could not depress, Clarke was forced to fly at zero feet *below* the low-flying seaplane as it began running for France. Time and again the faster Roc passed the seaplane with Hunt firing bursts. The He 59 was hit, but its gunners were also hitting back, and as the French coast approached, a frustrated Clarke, short of fuel, was forced to break off and head for Gosport, where he landed at 1940hrs. The crew were lucky, as the Roc's engine stopped soon after landing.

During the 20-minute action, the Roc was hit ten times and two unexploded incendiary rounds were found the fuel tank. In his combat report, Clarke made a claim for one He 59 damaged in what was certainly the strangest air combat of the Battle of Britain. Subsequently – and to his surprise – the pilot received a rebuke from his commanding officer, although an appeal to Fighter Command chief Hugh Dowding led to an apology. While Clarke and Hunt had engaged in air combat, they did not later qualify for the Battle of Britain clasp.

Controversial reconnaissance role aside, the Seenotdeinst saved numerous lives, including this Blenheim crew RONNIE BELL

The seaplane dropped, returning fire as it dived. Pilot Officer Henri Gonay, a Belgian, then moved in, hitting the engine. The He 59 struck the sea with Stelzner and his crew killed. Meanwhile, another Belgian, Pilot Officer Leon Prevot, spotted a second He 59. This was DA+MJ, commanded by Leutnant zur See Bernhardt Schulz, and he too came under attack but was able to evade by flying at 20ft with his rear gunner exchanging fire. However, a long burst from the Blenheim silenced the gun, and a thickening trail of smoke appeared before the seaplane disappeared into the sea.

The last kills

The last He 59 shot down within the now recognised dates of the Battle of Britain fell to Hurricanes of 229 Squadron on October 26. Just before midday, a trio of aircraft led by 21-year-old Flying Officer Geoffrey Simpson spotted the He 59 being flown by Leutnant Heinrich Wilke off Boulogne. This was shot down by Sergeant Rupert Ommanney, killing Wilke and his crew. However, retribution was swift as the escorting Bf 109s jumped the Hurricanes, sending Simpson to his death. They also hit Pilot Officer D McHardy, who was captured. Only Ommanney returned.

The scale of the German losses led to the Luftwaffe acquiring other flying boats including ex-French Bréguet Br 521 Bizertes. In November, it was one of these, flown by Seenotflugkdo 1's Oberfeldwebel Ulrich Janke, that was engaged by a 236 Squadron Blenheim Mk.IVf flown by Flying Officer Graham Russell, although they identified the aircraft as a Do 24.

Russell's air gunner, Sergeant Eric Pert, recalled: "First sortie with 236 was on November 6, 1940, when I replaced a gunner on an established crew. We got caught in a box barrage over Brest, to sight a Hipper-class cruiser in the harbour. We also flew over an enemy convoy, shot down its escorting Dornier 24 and passed an Me 110 returning from Falmouth (we ignored each other). Returned full of holes and with our observer badly wounded. I am pleased to say that the rest of my flying did not follow such an intensive pattern!"

Five days later, 249 Squadron found another He 59 above the Thames estuary, as Pilot Officer George Barclay recorded: "We found a Hun seaplane, low on the water. It did steep turns to the right while we tried to shoot it down. It turned so sharply that a stern attack turned into a head-on attack. I got its port motor, and it had to do its turns to the left, turning against its dead engine. Eventually Pat Wells set the port float on fire (there is a petrol tank there) and the enemy aircraft landed perfectly. It gradually burnt until the tanks went up and covered it and the sea with burning petrol."

As the Luftwaffe's bombing wings switched focus to night attacks, the last claim in the broader Battle of Britain period went to Flight Lieutenant 'Orange' O'Meara, a Hurricane pilot in 421 Flight. As dusk fell on November 26, he attacked what he identified as an He 60 – in fact, an He 59: "The presence of a He 60 and its escort approaching Dungeness was given to us by the 'Y' Service unit at Capel le Ferne direct by telephone link. I remember being in an awful hurry and took off in the nearest aircraft. I arrived in the area plotted by 'Y' and found the Heinkel without much difficulty. I never thought about the possibility of a fighter escort and went for it from the beam. I watched it fall into the sea and then raced back."

The He 59 had been searching for Feldwebel Adolf Rosen of IV/JG 51, who had been downed by 66 Squadron. O'Meara recalled: "I had been in the air for only 14 minutes. When I stepped out from the Hurricane, a rigger told me that sector had only just sent through a message to intercept."

For the Seenotdeinst crews, the Battle over Britain was over, but it had been long, bloody campaign mired in controversy. BW

The Dark Blue Few

During the Battle of Britain, the RAF received assistance from an unlikely source. Tom Spencer outlines the Fleet Air Arm contribution to the aerial defence of the UK

During the summer of 1940, responsibility for the air defence of Britain rested with the RAF. However, thanks to losses sustained in France and Norway, and the need to rotate weary pilots, Fighter Command had to contend with significant shortages. Its rapid expansion and training programme did ensure fresh pilots joined squadrons in desperate need for men, however, the newcomers lacked experience, while the long summer scrap for survival was defined by a concerning attrition rate.

Non-British pilots were increasingly relied on to restore the numbers. Among them were Poles and Czechs, those from other governments-in-exile, volunteers from a neutral US and intakes from Dominion/Empire air components. However, these took time to train, so many would not join squadrons until late in the battle – ‘X-Squad’, an Indian group, did not arrive in Britain until October 1940.

Off to a good start

Fortunately, airmen could be found in other flying services, including Bomber and Coastal Commands, the RAuxAF and the Fleet Air Arm (FAA). The naval contribution was particularly significant, not only because of its scale, but also the political implications of returning men to fly for the RAF, a service that until May 1939 had direct control over the FAA.

To help alleviate shortages, the FAA was asked for volunteers for secondment to Fighter Command, with the first joining squadrons just before the start of the Battle of Britain.

Fighter Command’s order of battle also included two FAA fighter squadrons. One was 804 Naval Air Squadron based at Hatston in the Orkneys. Though close to the Royal Navy’s fleet anchorage at Scapa Flow, it was logical that its operations should be controlled by the local fighter sector station. The squadron was led by Lieutenant-Commander John Cockburn and was still flying Sea Gladiators. These conducted interceptions during the ‘Phoney War’, but with the Luftwaffe focused on southern England, there was little activity in its area. In September, 804 NAS began to receive the US-built Martlet (Wildcat), but these saw no action until Christmas.

The same could not be said for the second FAA unit controlled by Fighter Command, 808 NAS, which formed on July 1, 1940, at Worthy Down, Hampshire – right in the path of the Luftwaffe. Under the command of Lieutenant Rupert Tillard and equipped with Fulmar two-seat carrier fighters, despite its exposed location the new squadron completed its work up there. At the beginning of September, it moved north to Castletown on the Pentland Firth, where it flew patrols against possible attacks on Scapa Flow. The following month it embarked in the carrier HMS *Ark Royal* for service in the Mediterranean.

With the two naval squadrons having a limited role in proceedings, it was left to individual FAA pilots to make a difference. One of the first was Sub Lieutenant Francis Dawson-Paul, who was posted to the Spitfire-equipped 64 Squadron at Kenley. He said of his new colleagues: “They are the grandest bunch of chaps I have ever known, [and] with a wizard CO.” On July 1 he became the first of the seconded pilots to make a claim when he shared the destruction of a Dornier Do 17. The same day, three more FAA pilots – Sub

A 64 Squadron pilot runs during a scramble. The unit was one of many to integrate FAA volunteers, including 64’s Sub Lieutenant Francis Dawson-Paul AUTHOR

Sub Lieutenant Geoffrey Bulmer was the first of the FAA augmentees to be killed in action VIA M GOODMAN

The Fulmer-equipped 808 NAS worked up on the south coast and also fell under Fighter Command P H T GREEN COLLECTION

The Sea Gladiators of 804 NAS operateed under Fighter Command as it protected Scapa Flow. Sub Lieutenant Sleigh is in the cockpit J W SLEIGH

One experienced 808 NAS pilot to serve in Fighter Command was Lieutenant Ted Taylour, who fhad flown Skuas in Norway C F SHORES

Two leading FAA pilots during the Battle of Britain were Sub Lieutenant Dickie Cork of 242 Squadron (left) and Arthur 'Admiral' Blake of 19 Squadron VIA M GOODMAN

Lieutenants Dickie Cork, 'Jimmie' Gardner and Midshipman Peter Patterson – joined the Hurricane-equipped 242 Squadron, which was commanded by Squadron Leader Douglas Bader. Also flying Hurricanes but with 213 Squadron, was Sub Lieutenant Denis Jeram, who made his first handling sortie with the squadron the next day. Jeram flew his initial patrol on July 9, participating in two sweeps of Bolt Head as the Luftwaffe concentrated attacks on coastal convoys. That same day, Midshipman Maurice Birrell damaged a Bf 109 off Dover while flying with 79 Squadron. By this point, Dawson-Paul had shot down two more German aircraft.

In 242 Squadron, the FAA pilots soon settled in and made a good impression on Bader. It was Jimmie Gardner who on the day the Battle of Britain officially started – July 10 – claimed the squadron's first bomber.

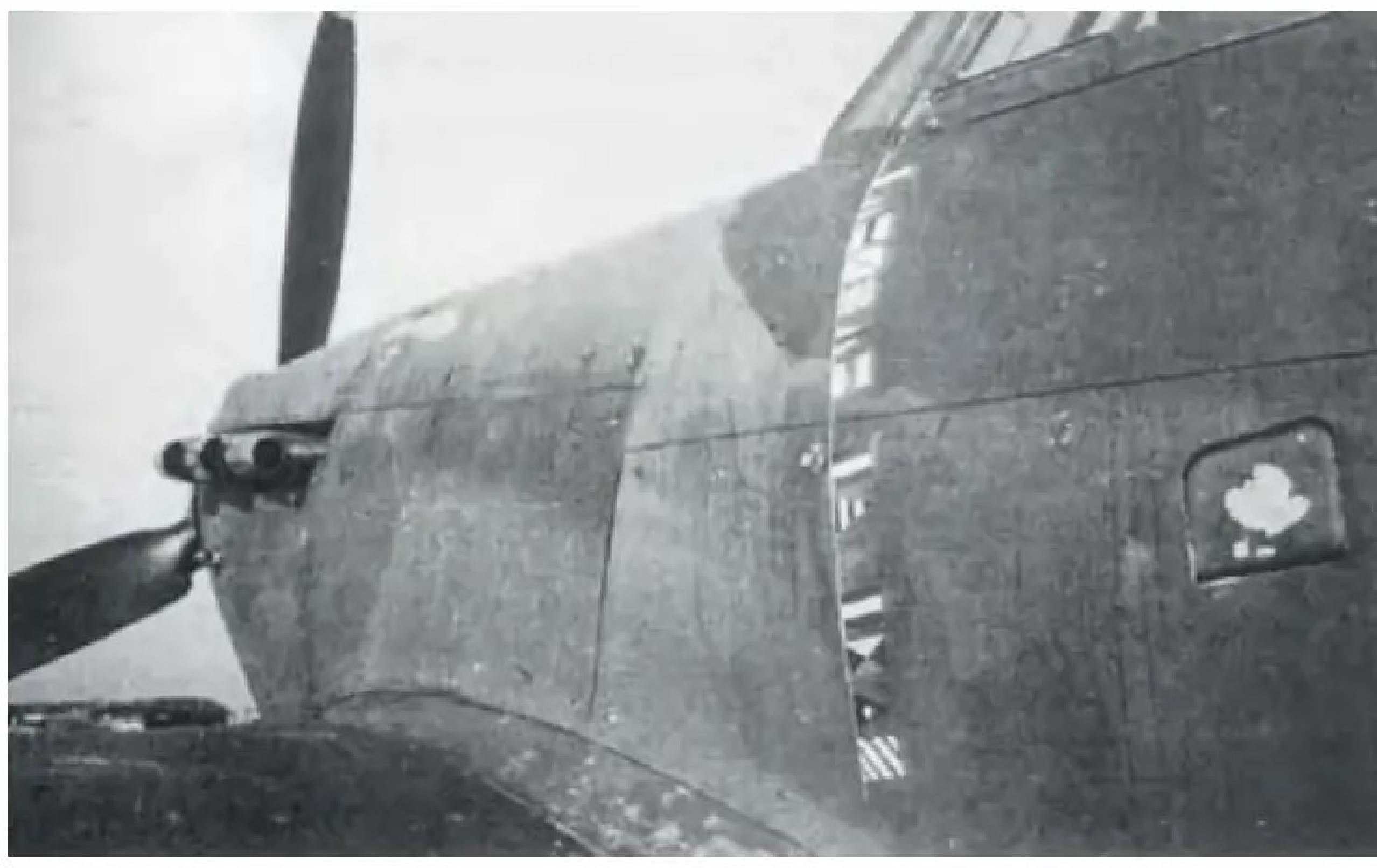
Later that day, Dawson-Paul went into action against Bf 110s over Dover, destroying two, making make him the first of the seconded pilots to become an ace. However, his moment of glory was brief, as on July 25 (having taken his total to 7½) he was shot down over the English Channel and, though picked up, died of his wounds.

On July 11, Jeram saw his first combat, downing a Junkers Ju 88. He wrote: "We sighted large numbers of Ju 88s so I opened fire on one, silenced his rear guns. He then dived suddenly letting out a length of wire attached to a parachute. He continued his dive with petrol, oil and smoke issuing forth. [I] broke away and opened fire on another. His starboard engine caught fire and he dived towards Chesil Beach. The second aircraft was definitely destroyed." Jeram was credited with a destroyed and a probable. The next day he shot down a Bf 110.

Another FAA pilot to fly Spitfires was Sub Lieutenant Arthur Blake, who served with 19 Squadron, where he was naturally nicknamed 'Admiral'. One of his contemporaries said: "Arthur was not a gung-ho, press on fighter boy, [the type] beloved by the press at the time. He was quietly spoken, justifiably self-confident and amiable with all ranks without being patronising. He was brave and capable."

> ***"The FAA pilots made a good impression on Bader. It was Sub Lieutenant Jimmie Gardner who on the day the Battle of Britain officially 'started' claimed 242 Squadron's first bomber"***

In spite of their enthusiasm – and like many of their RAF counterparts – most of



In 242 Squadron, FAA airmen suitably decorated their aircraft. Here, Jimmy Gardner's Hurricane wears the flags of Nelson's famous 'England Expects' message VIA T GRAVES

A 213 Squadron Hurricane being turned around for another sortie P H T GREEN COLLECTION

Midshipman Peter Patterson of 242 Squadron (left) and Sub Lieutenant Francis Dawson-Paul were both killed during the Battle of Britain 7 OTU RECORDS/P H T GREEN

the FAA pilots were inexperienced. On July 15, on his first sortie, Sub Lieutenant Henry Bramah of 213 Squadron destroyed a Do 17, but on his third patrol of the day he was shot down by return fire from a Do 17 near Dartmouth. He baled out, badly wounded, but was picked up by HMS *Scimitar*.

The first FAA pilot to pay the ultimate sacrifice was Sub Lieutenant Geoffrey Bulmer of 32 Squadron. He was killed on July 20, when his Hurricane Mk.I was shot down in a dogfight with JG 51 Bf 109s off Dover at around 1800hrs – the eighth victim of the German 101-victory experte, Oberleutnant Josef 'Pips' Priller.

There were further casualties on August 1 when 145 Squadron's Sub Lieutenant Ian Kestin attacked a Henschel Hs 126 army co-operation aircraft over the Channel, but his Hurricane was hit by return fire and he was killed.

The FAA men had their successes too, with 266 Squadron's Sub Lieutenant Henry 'Sinbad' Greenshields hitting three Bf 110s in his Spitfire off Selsey Bill on August 12, while 151 Squadron's Sub Lieutenant Henry Beggs bagged a 4./JG 52 Bf 109 over Kent. The next day, Beggs took his Hurricane into action against Bf 109s over Dover and was shot down and crashed at Shorncliffe. Greenshields destroyed a Bf 110 on August 15, but was himself shot down and killed the next day.

Flying into his first combat at 1700hrs on August 30, Dickie Cork of 242 Squadron was above Hatfield and later described the scene in a letter: "As we came down, the sky seemed full of black crosses and whichever way we turned Nazi bombers seemed to block our way, but we hit them hard and sent them skidding in all directions

"Their fighter escort was pretty useless and seemed more concerned with protecting themselves."

Aces aplenty

Meanwhile, Cork, in his debut action, was credited with a Bf 110 destroyed and a share in a second. His great friend Arthur Blake made his first claim on September 3, damaging a Bf 110 over Colchester.

On September 15 – now celebrated as 'Battle of Britain Day' – Cork despatched a Dornier and damaged a brace of Bf 109s over Maidstone, so becoming an 'ace'. The same day 'Admiral' Blake downed a Bf 109 and shared a Heinkel over London, two days later shooting down another two 109s near Canterbury and also achieving 'ace' status.

However, on September 19, Blake failed to return. Squadron Leader 'Sandy' Lane, his CO, wrote: "It is a great loss to the squadron. He was very well liked by all, as well as a pilot of exceptional ability."

The last victories claimed by FAA pilots during the Battle of Britain fell to Cork's 242 Squadron shipmate, 'Jimmie' Gardner, who on September 18 was credited with the destruction of two Dorniers over the River Thames, also raising his total to five. Both he and Dickie Cork were decorated with the DSC.

As the crisis passed, the surviving FAA pilots returned to naval service, having made a valuable contribution as some of 'The Few'. Indeed, those seconded to the RAF during the summer were without doubt the navy's greatest contribution to the aerial struggle. Eventually some 58 FAA airmen served with Fighter Command, and, of them, 12 made claims and four became 'aces'. A fifth achieved 'ace' status subsequently, having begun his tally in the skies over southern England. However, it came at a high cost, with seven FAA pilots killed and two wounded. BW

Spitfire Mk.I X4474/QV-I of 19 Squadron, with which 'Admiral' Blake served, lifts off on September 21 AHB

BELOW: **Hurricanes of 32 squadron await the scramble order at Hawkinge, July 1940** VIA J WEAL

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The Chief and the Colonel

In the 1890s, the 7th Hussars were locked in conflict against indigenous tribal dissidents, culminating in the controversial execution of a prominent induna, or leader, ordered by perhaps the last man you would expect. **Gerry van Tonder** follows proceedings via a journal kept by an aspiring Hussars officer

Matabele warriors attack the British section in the granite hills near Bulawayo during the rebellion HERITAGE IMAGES/GETTY

Captain Robert Poore of 'D' Squadron, 7th (Queen's Own) Hussars
JOURNAL OF CAPTAIN R M POORE 7TH HUSSARS IN RHODESIA

On October 22, 1895, the 7th (Queen's Own) Hussars arrived in Durban, South Africa, to relieve the 3rd Dragoon Guards in the Natal posting. However, on April 3, 1896, orders were received for three of the regiment's five squadrons – 'A', 'C' and 'D' – to proceed to Rhodesia, via Mafeking, to assist with quelling an insurrection by the amaNdebele in Matabeleland.

Recently promoted, Captain Robert Montagu Poore, 'D' Squadron, maintained a detailed journal describing some of the regiment's experiences during their Rhodesian expedition, leading up to their arrival in Gwelo and participation in quelling both rebellions. His journal provides a snapshot into the conflicts, highlighting not only their nature, but also the intense hardships and deprivations suffered by the Hussars operating in an alien environment.

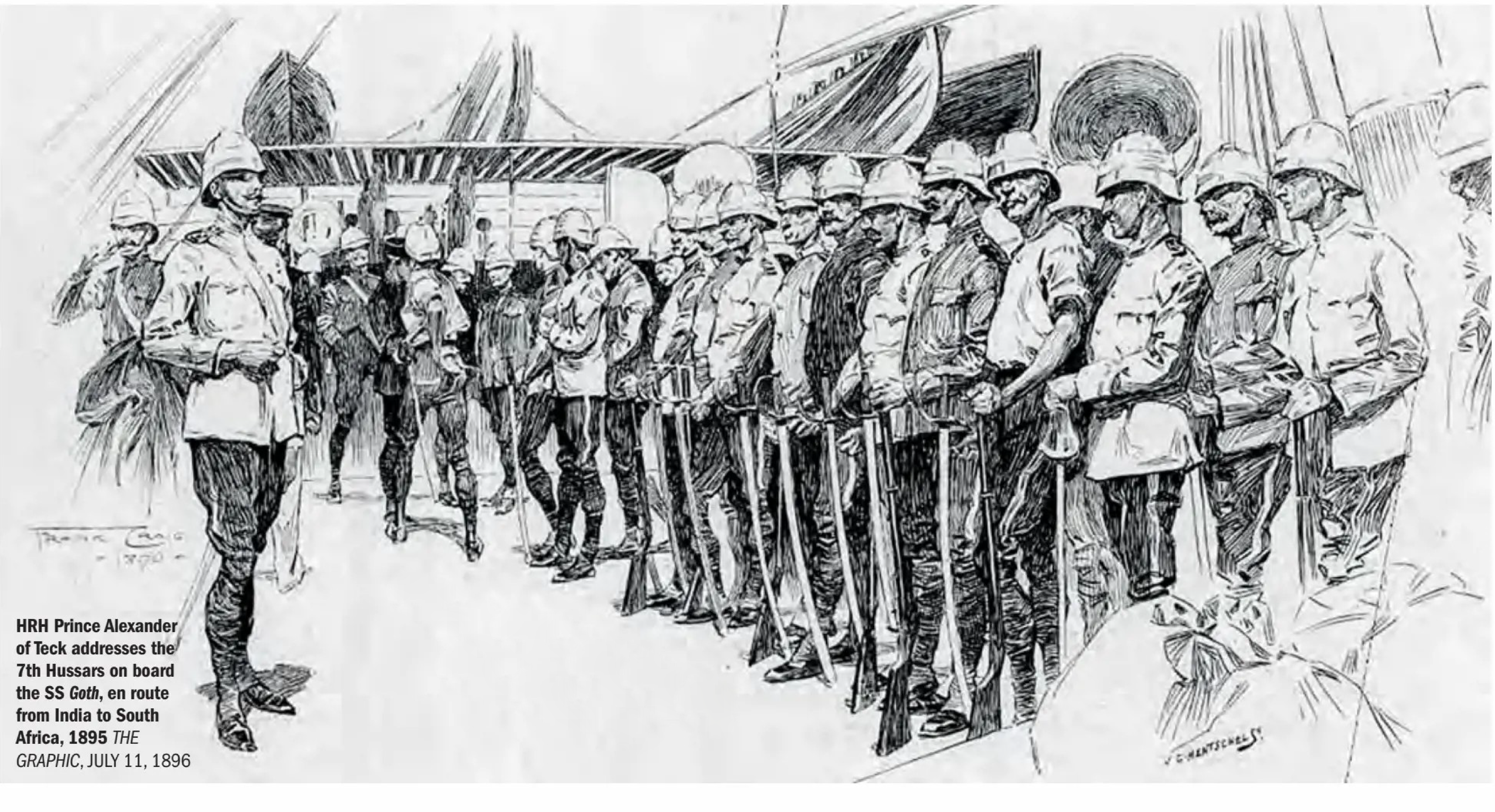
Travelling by ship to the port of East London in South Africa, and then by train, the Hussars reached Mafeking on May 8. From there, Lieutenant-Colonel Harold Paget led his men to the Rhodesian border garrison at Fort Tuli. The Hussars were accompanied by 270 men of the 2nd West Riding Regiment, and 156 men from the 2nd York and Lancaster Regiment.

Back in 1890, an eclectic column of several hundred armed and mounted white men of predominantly British origin hoisted the Union Jack on a spot in a tract of land north of the Limpopo River, which they claimed on behalf of Queen Victoria. They named the site Fort Salisbury after the 3rd Marquess of Salisbury, then the British prime minister, but today it is the capital of Zimbabwe, Harare. This territory became known as Rhodesia after diamond magnate and imperialist Cecil John Rhodes, whose chartered British South Africa Company (BSACo) retained 'ownership' of the territory until 1923 when it became a self-governing Crown Colony.

The "pioneers", as the men of the column were called, comprised a miscellany of British officers, BSACo police, traders, prospectors, farmers and opportunists who, largely recruited in South Africa, enlisted with the promise of mining claims that would yield gold of quantities that eclipsed even the vast Johannesburg goldfields. However, the arrival of the settlers caused considerable disquiet within the amaNdebele Kingdom of Lobengula whose realm the foreigners had usurped, and the raising of the flag also raised their ire.

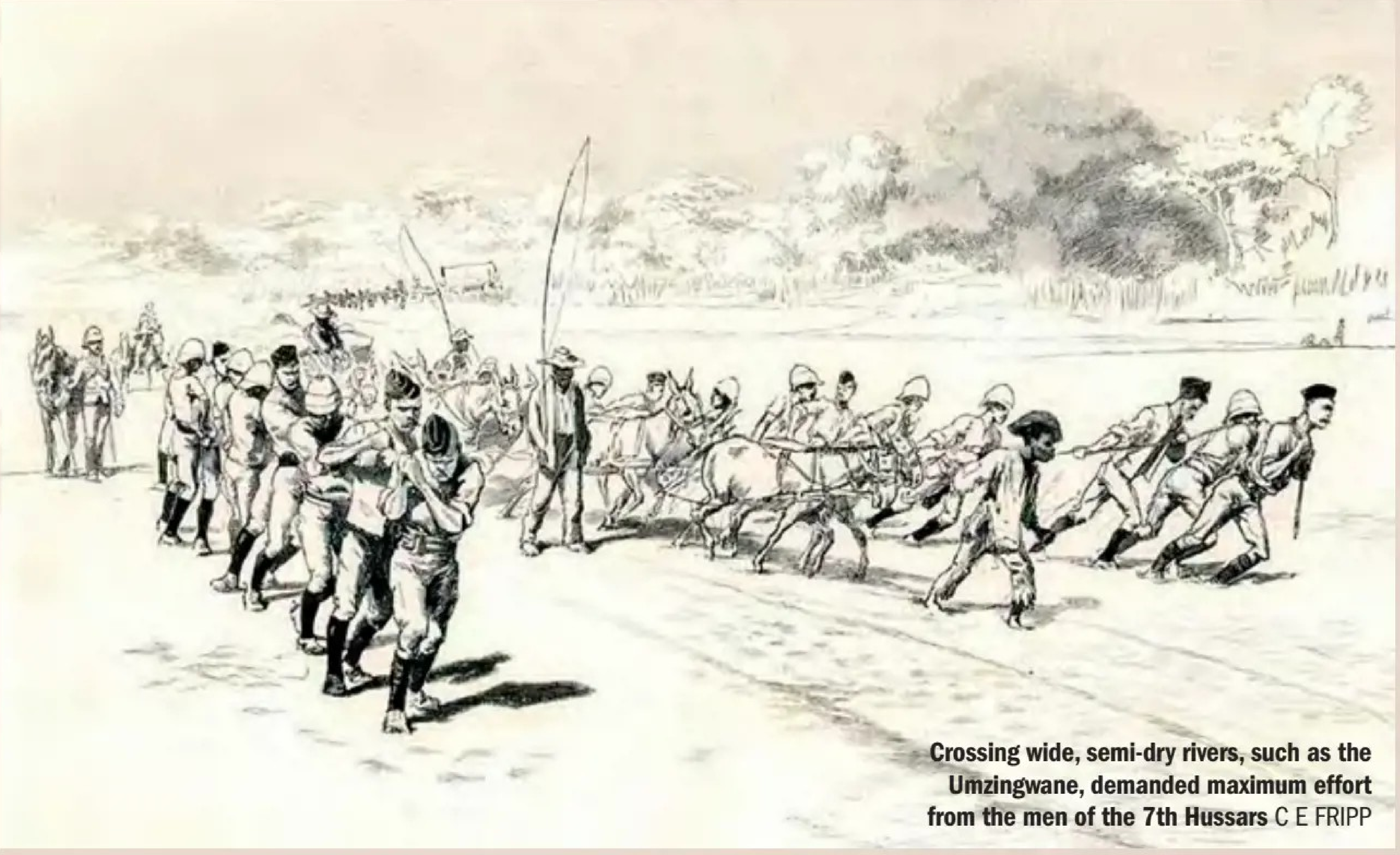
With their royal seat in Bulawayo in the southwest of the territory, the amaNdebele – called Matabele by the colonists – were an offshoot of the Zulu Empire driven by internal upheaval to migrate north in the first half of the century. The rest of the territory was inhabited by Mashona-speaking tribes who were regarded by Lobengula as his vassals. In November 1893, having perceived Lobengula as a threat, the BSACo found reason to seize Bulawayo, forcing Lobengula to flee and die in obscurity. There would not be a successor to Lobengula, but under their tribal chiefs, or induna, hatred against the settlers by the regimented and warlike amaNdebele grew. Further fuelled by the deadly cattle disease rinderpest, drought and plagues of locusts, in March 1896 the amaNdebele rose in full rebellion, massacring scores of defenceless settlers – including women and children – living in the countryside. In August, the Mashona followed, and the 7th Hussars would fight not one, but two indigenous uprisings.

It was into this that the three squadrons of the Hussars had been ordered from Natal. According to the BSACo medal roll for the BSACo 1896 medal and clasp, 228 men from the regiment served in Rhodesia. After proceeding to Fort Victoria, Colonel Paget received orders from Major-General Frederick Carrington to march to the midland town of Gwelo (now Gweru) for operations, and it was reached on September 4, 1896.



HRH Prince Alexander of Teck addresses the 7th Hussars on board the SS *Goth*, en route from India to South Africa, 1895 *THE GRAPHIC*, JULY 11, 1896

The rebellion began with some 2,000 Matabele warriors, but expanded rapidly with perhaps as many as 50,000 ultimately taking up arms. As well as traditional assegais, knobkerries and axes, the Matabele had developed some proficiency with firearms and incorporated them more effectively than the Zulu had 20 years earlier. Supplementing their obsolete muzzle-loading weapons, the rebels had Martini-Henry rifles, Winchester repeaters and even Lee-Metford bolt-action rifles issued to the British since 1888.


Crossing wide, semi-dry rivers, such as the Umzingwane, demanded maximum effort from the men of the 7th Hussars C E FRIPP

The march to Bulawayo

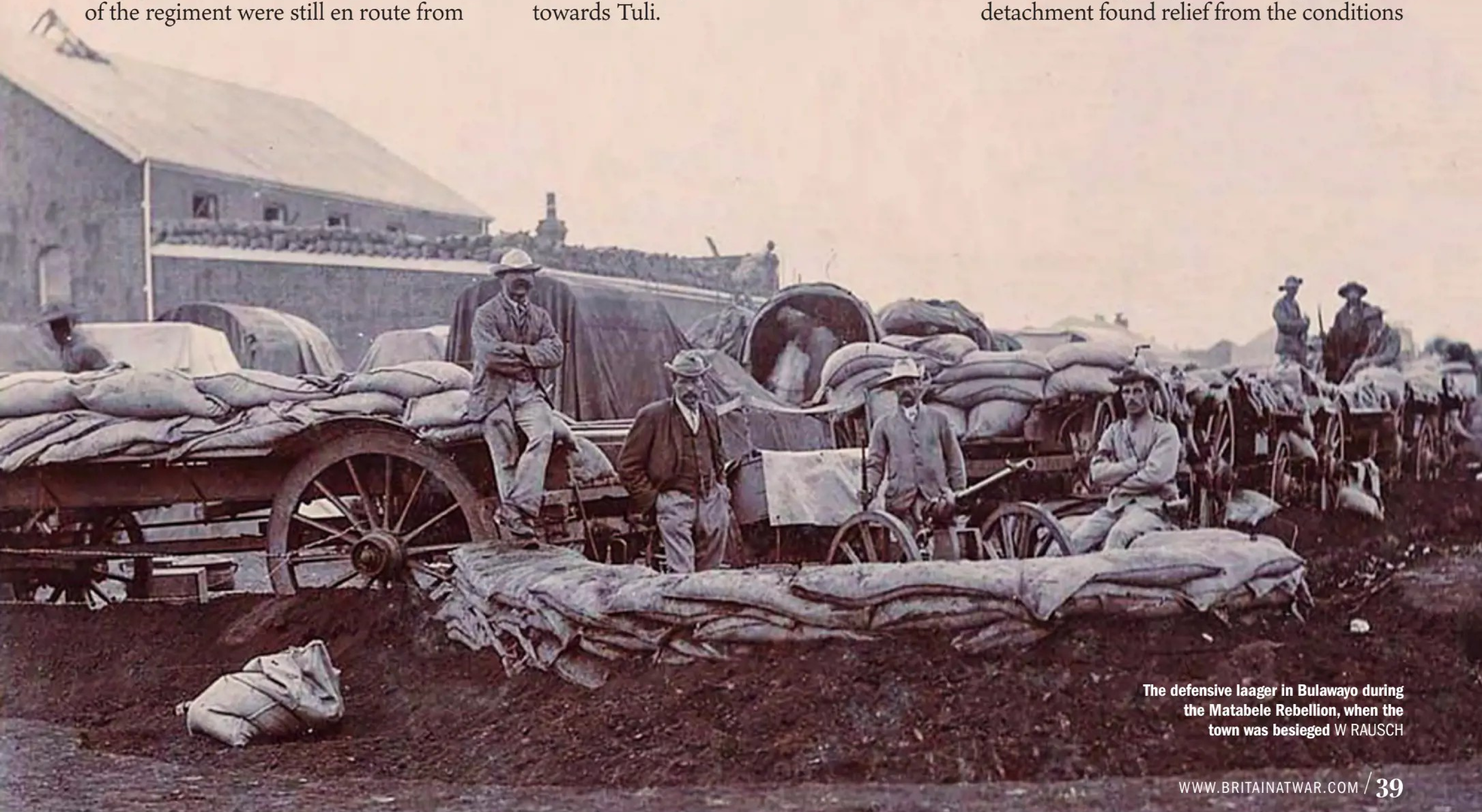
Soon, Bulawayo was essentially under siege. Upwards of 10,000 Matabele were around the town, its residents and small garrison relatively free to live and work as normal in daylight, but at night were forced into a small, fortified laager to ward off raids. Waggons and sandbags, covered in barbed wire and with smashed glass scattered across the approaches, formed the main defence, although blasting explosives and bundles of wood soaked in oil were positioned at key locations as traps. Unbeknown to the rebels, there were scant firearms in Bulawayo, but there were just enough to remind the tribesmen of the firepower that had decimated them in prior conflicts, and they were unwilling to attack en masse. They also failed to cut telegraph lines.

For the Hussars, forming part of one of several relief columns, May to July saw a piecemeal movement north from Mafeking and into Matabeleland via the small garrison at Fort Tuli. On July 25, Capt Poore left Tuli for Bulawayo with a 'D' Squadron detachment. Rear elements of the regiment were still en route from Bechuanaland: "July 1896, Wednesday 22nd. Found Col Paget, [Lieutenant] Norton, 'A' Squadron and the Company Mounted Infantry, the latter moved out at 3.30pm and proceeded seven miles towards Tuli.

> *"Company M.I. go to Bulawayo pretty soon under Major Harold Ridley. There has been more fighting in this part of the country, so it seems we shall probably have the best of it"*
>
> Captain Robert Poore, 7th Hussars

"The force here are going to Victoria and Salisbury under Paget, as soon as [Lieutenant] Dalgety arrives from Mafeking (by coach) with two Maxim guns. 'D' Squadron and the Company M.I. go to Bulawayo pretty soon under Major Harold Ridley. There has been more fighting in this part of the country, so it seems we shall probably have the best of it."

In the first two weeks of August, the 7th Hussars HQ joined the column as it made its ponderous way along barely discernible tracks to Fort Victoria; marching a mere six to seven miles a day. Water was scarce and rinderpest decimated the regiment's slaughter-cattle. Poore, together with Second Lieutenant Prince Alexander of Teck (uncle to the future Kings Edward VIII and George VI) and a 'D' Squadron detachment found relief from the conditions


The defensive laager in Bulawayo during the Matabele Rebellion, when the town was besieged W RAUSCH

Officers of the 7th Hussars at Bulawayo, 1896. Third left stands the CO Lieutenant -Colonel Harold Paget and, far right, HRH Lieutenant Prince Alexander of Teck AUTHOR

in forts before arriving at Bulawayo: "August 1896, Sunday 2nd. The fort at Mangwe is a round one, it's a very small one, but several waggons are drawn up between the outer ditch and the fort itself, in which people live. Captain van Rooyen (a Boer) commands this fort and is a good sort of man.

"Thursday 6th. We halted at Fort Halstead (distance eight miles). The fort is on a kopje and is much stronger than the circular ones. I spent the day in the fort with Lieutenant Birch who is in command, and very glad I was to do it as I was feeling rather seedy. Had a bathe and a thorough clean-up, which was a great comfort, as it has been a long time since I have had the chance of a real good wash.

"Sunday 9th. Captain Agnew, Teck, and self, rode into Bulawayo. Bulawayo is quite a different place to any we have seen yet, the streets are parallel or at right angles to one another, but the spaces between are by no means filled up. There are well-built brick houses, but nearly all of them have large brass plates on them indicating they are the offices of different companies. We found our way to the club, where we have all been made honorary members, and it was most refreshing getting the chance of seeing the papers."

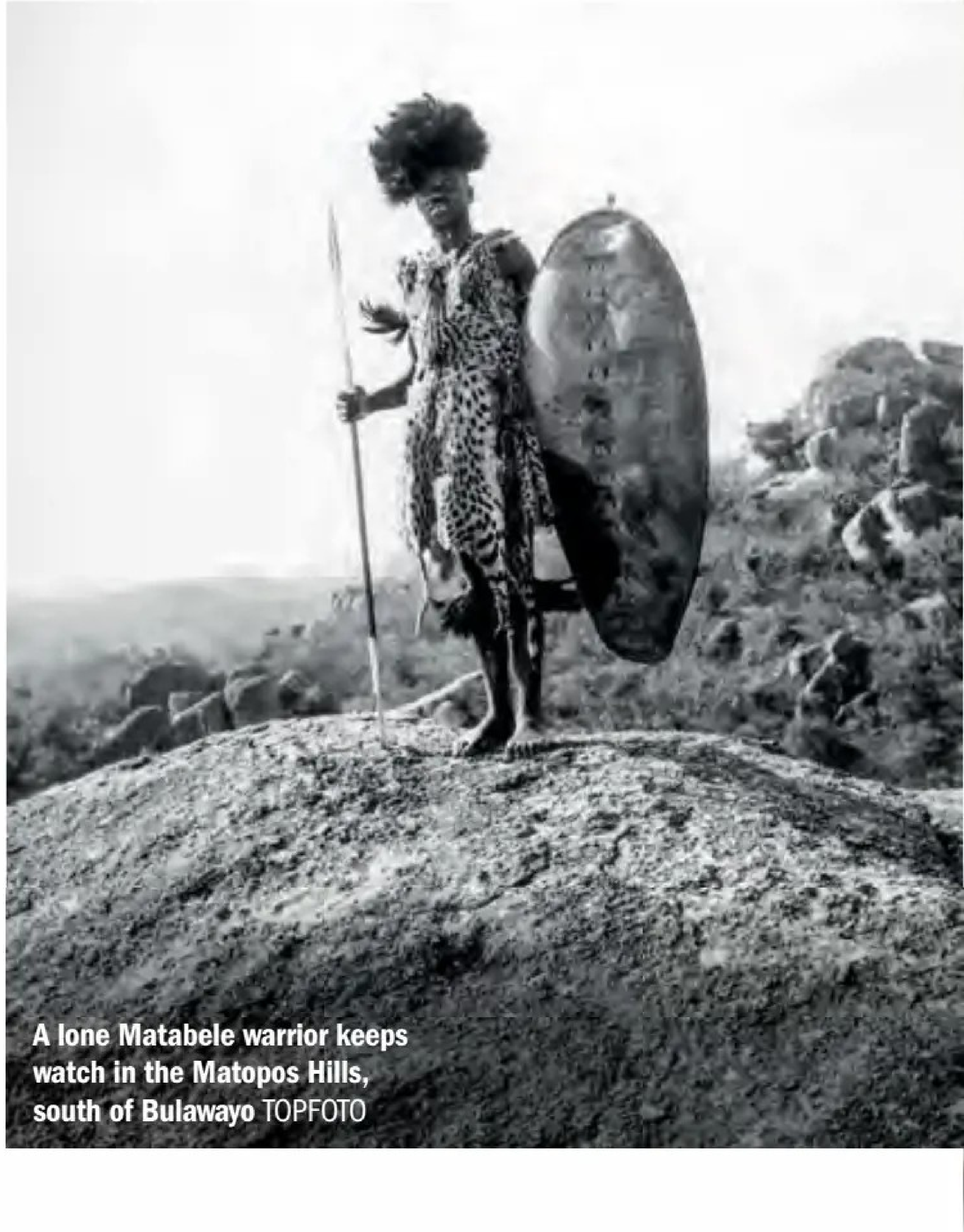
Brush in the bush

The Hussars were yet to confront an elusive enemy in the bouldered kopjes and dark caves they knew very well. As the Mashona uprising spread across districts north and south of Salisbury, General Carrington became concerned that he was not sufficiently proactive in taking the conflict to the rebels. Accordingly, Paget was ordered to Gwelo where the only colonial presence was a small garrison.

This resulted in the Hussars, 56 mounted infantry and 150 police embarking on an expedition covering the area between Gwelo and Shangani where the rebels were operating in force: "Thursday 13th. At 1225pm our scouts first sighted the enemy and it's curious to see these people, when any one is seen, pass the word along and all squat down.

"From here we went at a sharp trot for four miles, we were considered very close to the enemy, we were sent in extended order to the right, and after going for about a mile the bush became so thick we were not able to penetrate it. We made for our camping ground going by a circuitous road

Elements of the 7th Hussars with a Maxim gun at Fort Umlugulu, Matopos, near Bulawayo AUTHOR



A lone Matabele warrior keeps watch in the Matopos Hills, south of Bulawayo TOPFOTO

Shown here as a general, Colonel Robert Baden-Powell had a key part to play in quashing the rebellion BAIN COLLECTION/ US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

> *"The mounted infantry and ourselves swarmed up, burning a portion of the kraal. There are a lot of large caves, but it was madness to go down into them as they are capable of holding several hundred men"*
>
> CAPTAIN ROBERT POORE, 7TH HUSSARS

and came across nobody. The M.I. turned up after us, instead of going to the right as we had done, they had gone straight on and came across several of the enemy, whom they routed and killed a few, this showed us we were just too late for them."

Poore's journal reveals the methods to counter the dissidents, as the British attempted bold movements and aimed to isolate the rebels from fellow tribespeople: "Thursday 20th. We marched without waggons for eight days – a thing people about here thought Imperial troops quite incapable of doing. We marched about 23-25 miles a day, about 150 Matabele were killed, 350 women brought in as prisoners and 200 goats captured. The taking of women is important as they do all the work and the men become discontented when they have not got their women."

Evidently, successes were had – although perhaps some were beginning to take matters less seriously: "Friday 21st. Went into Bulawayo this morning. The authorities object to soldiers being near the town as the temptation for drink is much stronger than any other place, although this article is extremely high the volunteer privates get from 7/6 to 10/- a day. Saw a party of volunteers under Captain Van Niekerk [Afrikander Corps] start out from Bulawayo in the afternoon, half were hopelessly drunk, and these are the people who are to accompany us on our next expedition to the Shangani."

Scouring Shangani stronghold

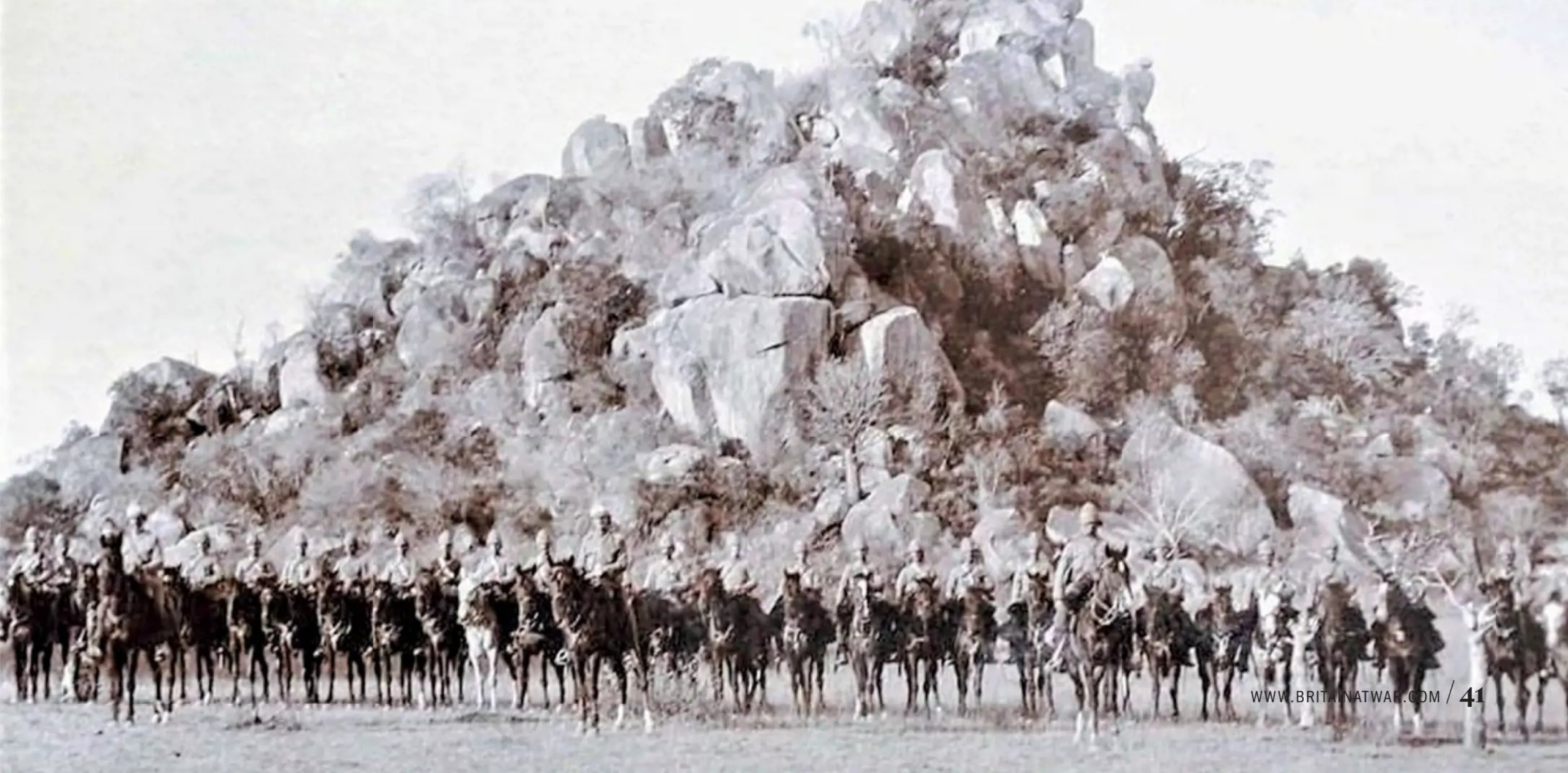
At this time, Colonel Robert Baden-Powell led a force made up of 7th Hussars, the 2nd Yorks and Lancs and the Afrikander Corps with the specific objective of neutralising the extremely powerful Chief Uwini in his Shangani stronghold. Uwini was described by Baden-Powell as "a fine, truculent-looking savage who boasted that he had always been able to hold his own against any enemies in this stronghold of his".

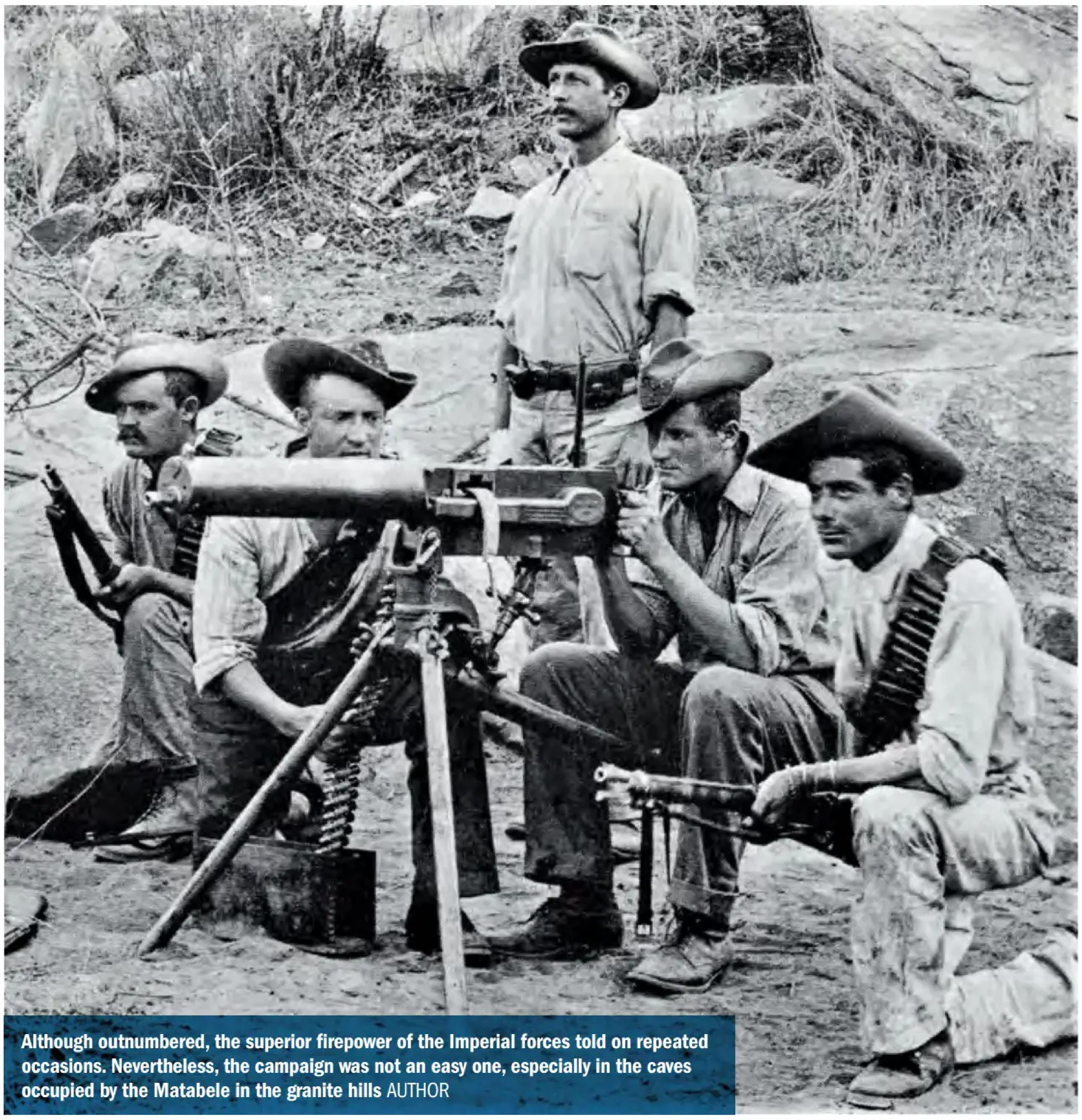
As Poore notes, the stronghold was quite the obstacle: "September 1896, Monday 7th. When we came to Uwini's kraal – which is on a large kopje – the mounted infantry and ourselves swarmed up and over it, burning a portion of the kraal and finding a lot of grain. There are a lot of large caves, but it was madness to go down into them as they are capable of holding several hundred men. Some men of my troop got detached from me, and while trying to get a lot of assegais out of the mouth of the cave [they] were fired on, one man had his right hand shattered, the other a bullet through his thigh. The former had his hand amputated on his return from camp. We saw several natives on other kopjes, but they never came to attack us.

"Tuesday 8th. We all marched at 6.30am, the waggons going four to five miles and forming a laager near Uwini's kraal. We went to the caves, the place looked appallingly strong and Major Ridley would not attack it. We saw a lot of natives who retreated into their caves on our approach, we fired volleys at the mouths of the caves, and we fired the kraals, but all our movements were terribly slow, nor did we have any systematic way to do them harm, we did nothing but loiter about the place.

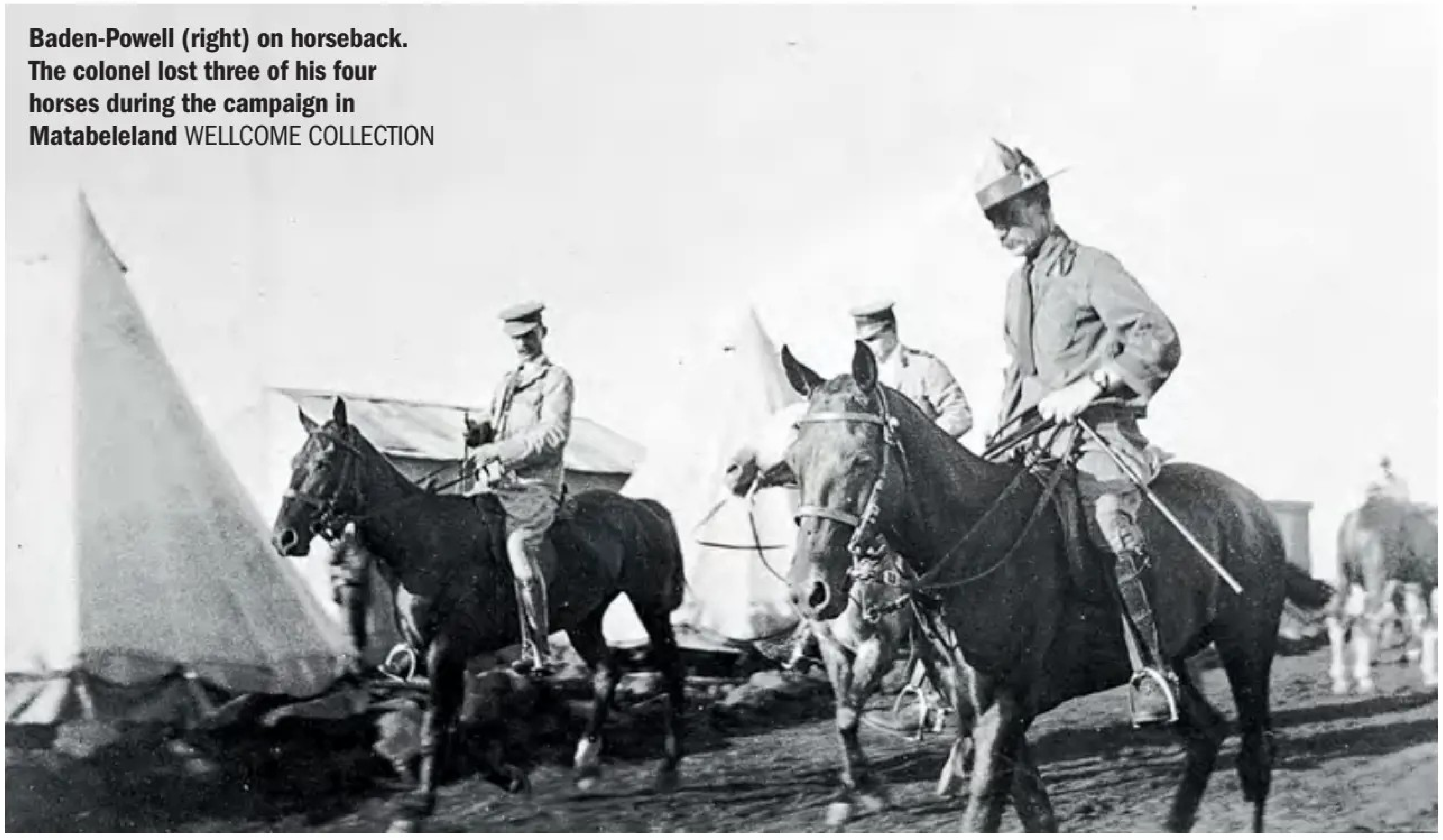
"At 3pm, I went with Van Niekerk and others on foot to inspect some of the caves. We came across one where we heard a child cry, this meant there were women – and that meant men. We commenced to try and smoke them out, a woman was nearly taken,

Men of the 7th Hussars in front of a typical bouldered kopje in which the rebels sought refuge AUTHOR





Although outnumbered, the superior firepower of the Imperial forces told on repeated occasions. Nevertheless, the campaign was not an easy one, especially in the caves occupied by the Matabele in the granite hills AUTHOR



Baden-Powell (right) on horseback. The colonel lost three of his four horses during the campaign in Matabeleland WELLCOME COLLECTION

and one of our men was nearly shot from inside, but we could not get them out. Sharp firing was to be heard from Uwini's kopje (next door), here we found the enemy had beaten back some volunteers who tried to get into their caves, and some marvellous escapes occurred. Several fires were seen around us after dark, probably signal fires."

Poore also recounted the last stand of the influential Uwini: "Thursday 10th. Major Ridley took a patrol of 30 men and went into the Somabula Forest in the same direction as I went yesterday, another went in the opposite direction. I did not go out today to give my horses a rest, I watched our 7-pounder gun pound away at the fortifications and into the caves, the natives dislike this weapon very much.

"The volunteers went at the kopje all day, they wounded Uwini this morning, but towards evening they did a very plucky thing by going into the cave – although fired on, none of the volunteers were injured. Old Uwini had been wounded by a shot through his left shoulder, he said that for 20 years he had kept the Matabeles off."

The trial of Chief Uwini

Fighting for the stronghold continued for a few more days. Poore took out a patrol that "led to our finding the spoor [track] of a herd of cattle, with difficulty we followed this up and came to a place where a party with cattle had actually left this morning. Later, we made a capture of two men, 16 women and children. Got back to camp at 6pm. I only had a cup of coffee and a little bread at 6am and had had nothing since."

Ridley's patrol also found a spoor but had to give up the chase. Nonetheless, his men killed three enemy. While the patrols were out, a volunteer corporal was shot dead on a kopje and a mule speared. Meanwhile, the volunteers encircled a kopje occupied by the rebels, killing four of them.

Baden-Powell had also arrived at the camp. He had orders to hand over any prisoners to civil authorities, but later wrote: "[Uwini] was badly wounded, but enraged at being a prisoner, he would allow nothing to be done for him; no sooner had the surgeon bandaged him than he tore the dressings off again… now that he was captured, he only wished to die."

Chief Uwini was charged with "armed resistance to constituted authority". Unable to spare an escort to move him to Bulawayo, Baden-Powell wrote to his senior officers: "I have taken another step, that I hope you will not disapprove of – viz – trying Uwini by Court Martial."

In a highly controversial development and citing evidence of the chief's involvement in attacks on white settlers and hopeful the execution of a powerful figure would supress further rebellion, Uwini was placed before a military tribunal, found guilty and shot by a firing squad. Having approved the death sentence, many demanded Baden-Powell be charged with war crimes. However, the future founder of the Scout movement was exonerated by an inquiry.

Poore wrote: "Sunday 13th. Church parade at 9.30am. At noon I was president of a board (with Thurnall and Teck as members) on the articles destroyed by Friday afternoon's fire. After lunch Ridley was President of a General Court Martial on Chief Uwini, Colonel Baden-Powell confirmed the sentence which was death; the old man was led out and placed before six volunteer riflemen, he stood up and met his death like a man."

Following the demise of Chief Uwini, the Imperial troops returned to Gwelo, on their way discovering almost all tribal villages deserted, but yielding large quantities of stored grain essential for animal feed.

Sweeps and shortages

However, Baden-Powell had other ideas. Poore wrote: "Col Baden-Powell (who has superseded Major Ridley in command of the column) took 150 men to see if he could not find some of the enemy in a west/

Salisbury – now Harare – was better prepared to ward off Shona rebels in the second of the two rebellions AUTHOR

FROM THE VELDT TO THE GREEN

Brigadier-General Robert Montagu Poore CIE, DSO, DL, JP, was born on March 20, 1866, in Blackrock, County Dublin. In August 1883, he enlisted in the 3rd Duke of Edinburgh's (Wiltshire) Regiment, and in April 1886 received a commission in the British Army.

Transferred to the 7th Hussars on October 27, 1886, Poore served in British India where he was aide-de-camp to the Governor of Bombay from 1892. His promotion to captain came on July 1, 1896, and subsequently to brevet major in May 1898. After the Matabele Rebellion, Poore served during the Second Boer War as an army provost marshal, reporting to Lords Roberts and Kitchener; seeing action in the Orange Free State at Paardeberg, Poplar Grove, Driefontein, Vet River and Zand River and in the Transvaal at Pretoria, Diamond Hill and Bergendal.

Perhaps Poore's witnessing of the fate of Chief Uwini was informative, as he was mentioned in despatches by Lord Roberts in March 1900 for his "care of prisoners" and conduct in "maintaining order in camp and on the line of march". He was also the lead investigator into war crimes allegations against Harry 'Breaker' Morant and Peter Handcock, which led to their trial and execution in February 1902.

Poore received the DSO in April 1901 in "recognition of the services in connection with the campaign in South Africa" and, excluding a six-month gap, he remained on military service in South Africa until 1905. In August 1910 he was promoted to substantive major, then to lieutenant-colonel in June 1911, before returning to India as commanding officer of the 7th Hussars.

During World War One, Poore became a colonel and in August 1915 he was appointed commander of the Jhansi Brigade in the British Indian Army, an appointment he retained for the rest of the war. He remained in India and did not see combat. Poore was appointed a Companion of the Order of the Indian Empire in the 1918 Birthday Honours List. He relinquished his command of the Jhansi Brigade in October 1919 and retired in March 1921 having been granted the honorary rank of brigadier-general. He died on July 14, 1938, in Boscombe, Hampshire.

Poore was also an accomplished tennis and polo player but had a great passion for cricket, styling his game on the famous W G Grace. He played first-class cricket in India, representing the 'Europeans', Bombay and Government House. Poore continued his prolific form when he went to South Africa, scoring 1,600 runs in but a few months. During Lord Hawke's English cricket team tour in 1895-96 he was called up to the South African team, playing in all three test matches. In 21 innings over the course of the 1899 season, Poore scored 1,551 runs at an average of 91.23, a record for an English season not broken until Don Bradman averaged 98.66 in 1930 and not surpassed by an English batsman until Herbert Sutcliffe averaged 96.96 in 1931.

Matabele journal keeper Captain (Brigadier-General) Robert Poore was a skilled cricketer who secured an impressive batting record. He is shown here (middle, right) next to W G Grace and the rest of the Gentlemen XI at Lords in 1899 AUTHOR

amaNdebele indunas, or chiefs, at a meeting in Bulawayo after the rebellion was put down W RAUSCH

Future field marshal Sir Douglas Haig served in the 7th Hussars as a young officer, although at the time of the Matabele Rebellion he was attending Staff College before serving in Sudan NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SCOTLAND

northwest direction. Baden-Powell decided to split into three patrols. I was to have 40 men and, accompanying the Colonel himself, we are to go to the junction of the Shangani and Gwelo Rivers. Major Ridley, Teck and 20 men were to search along the north side of the Umvungu and Shangani, Captain Kekewich was to strike across to the Gwelo and search the country south of it, while Thurnall remains in charge of the waggons and escort.

"Sunday 20th. Our intention was to recross the Shangani, but our guides (according to our compasses) were not taking us to where we wanted to go. We retraced our steps to the Gwelo and marched down its banks till 11am, where we camped till 4pm. We killed an exhausted horse, cut him up and issued him as rations, we have been out of meat for days and had expected to find a lot of buck to feed on but these seem to have been killed by rinderpest. This is also our last day of bread. Horse is not pleasant eating but when one has nothing, one has to eat what there is.

"We commenced a night march to the Shangani, our guides having been dispatched to the waggons to say we were in great want of food. The horses were so reduced, I found it necessary to make nearly everybody walk, and some horses were carrying two saddles to relieve some who could not carry one."

By the 26th there was nothing left: "The men were picking leaves off the trees for something to smoke." Three days later, the news they were waiting for arrived: "Our provision waggon was close but stuck in a drift. I turned out most of the men to get it out . We now had supplies till October 4th. I was delighted to get a change of clothing, I had worn the same clothes for 16 days. "

> ***"We killed an exhausted horse, cut him up and issued him as rations, we have been out of meat for days. This is also our last day of bread. Horse is not pleasant eating but when one has nothing, one has to eat what there is"***
>
> CAPTAIN ROBERT POORE, 7TH HUSSARS

Poore's men arrived at Inyati, finding the main column had been and gone, retracing its steps to the Umvungu. There they joined with Paget to sortie against two chiefs who were holding out. On October 8, Poore received his new orders: "The garrison of the fort were relieved today by a fresh lot of volunteers from Bulawayo. Received orders that I was to remain here as some enemies have been seen on the Umvungu Drift, I was to be in readiness to go to the assistance of the fort there in case of necessity." The following day, a native commissioner, Captain Robinson, passed through Poore's post en route for the drift to investigate reports of a rebel presence. Poore, again "terribly short of supplies", also started off a waggon for Bulawayo to retrieve some. Poore's tour of duty ended shortly after.

The Hussars headquartered in Gwelo until November when the regiment moved north to assist with the fight in Mashonaland. Remaining in Rhodesia until the end of the Mashona Rebellion in September 1897, the 7th Hussars sailed from Beira in Portuguese East Africa for Durban, reuniting with the squadrons that had remained in Natal, before it followed Poore in its return to Britain.

A bound transcript of Poore's journal is kept in the National Army Museum.

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MILITARY INTELLIGENCE MUSEUM

Tom Baker visits the Military Intelligence Museum, the UK's only institution dedicated to preserving the history of information gathering and analysis in the British armed forces

Two weeks after VE Day, three British soldiers were manning a checkpoint in Bremervörde, northern Germany, when a trio of weary men approached. Two were clad in long overcoats, while the third wore civilian clothes, a blue raincoat and an eyepatch.

On duty that day was Sergeant Arthur Britton of 45 Field Security Section (FSS), Intelligence Corps, and two fellow NCOs. Stopping the trio, they examined the papers of the first two men, who proved to be members of the German Secret Field Police (GFP), part of the Sicherheitsdienst (SD). The third man identified himself as Heinrich Hitzinger, a feldwebel serving in the same force.

However, something was wrong. Britton noted that the identity papers of 'Hitzinger' bore Schutzstaffel (SS) stamps rather than GFP ones and bore telltale marks of forgery. Applying the intelligence cycle – questioning, verifying, identifying inconsistencies and acting – Britton detained the trio and drove them to No.031 Civil Internment Camp at Barnstedt. The following evening, the man in the raincoat revealed his true identity: Heinrich Himmler, former Reichsführer-SS, architect of the Final Solution and the most wanted Nazi official in a liberated Europe and Allied-occupied Germany.

Today, the forged identity document that unmasked Himmler is on display at the Military Intelligence Museum in Chicksands, Bedfordshire, the UK's only institution dedicated to preserving the history of the collection, analysis and application of military information. The document is one of hundreds of artefacts tracing the evolution of British military intelligence from the meticulous work of wartime field operatives to the multi-domain complexity of the present day.

The museum was inaugurated in 1969, when Intelligence Corps officers at the School of Service Intelligence in Templer Barracks, Ashford, recognised the need to preserve the history fo the corps for recruits. By the mid-1970s, it had opened to the public and, in 1997, relocated to the secure MOD site at Chicksands. The move expanded the site's focus to tri-service intelligence, reflecting the integrated nature of modern military information gathering. The museum adopted its current name in 2003, and in 2008, underwent a major refurbishment.

As Chicksands is an active MOD site, visitors must book in advance and, on arrival, pass through security to enter the heart of a working military base. The museum's displays are arranged across a single, fully wheelchair-accessible floor, with all five of the site's exhibition rooms linked by a long gallery.

First stop is Room One, which serves as an introduction to the concept of military intelligence. Speaking to *Britain at War*, curator Bill Steadman said: "Here, a display explains the 'Intelligence Cycle' of questioning, researching, analysing and deciding. This is the same methodology that Sergeant Arthur Britton applied when he spotted irregularities in Himmler's forged papers, and that same cycle has underpinned British intelligence gathering operations from the Napoleonic era to the modern day."

The Military Intelligence Museum
SHARING THE SECRET
SHARING THE SECRET
Sharing the Secret

The Military Intelligence Museum is located 'behind the wire' of the operational MOD Chicksands site IMAGES COURTESY OF THE MILITARY INTELLIGENCE MUSEUM

The Special Operations Executive display located in Room One

THE INTELLIGENCE CORPS OF THE
FIRST WORLD WAR

In Room Two, a series of interactive displays and cabinets chart the Intelligence Corps' activities during World War One

The integration of women into the Corps is covered, noting that women played vital intelligence roles during World War One, but only in 1992 did they join the corps formally

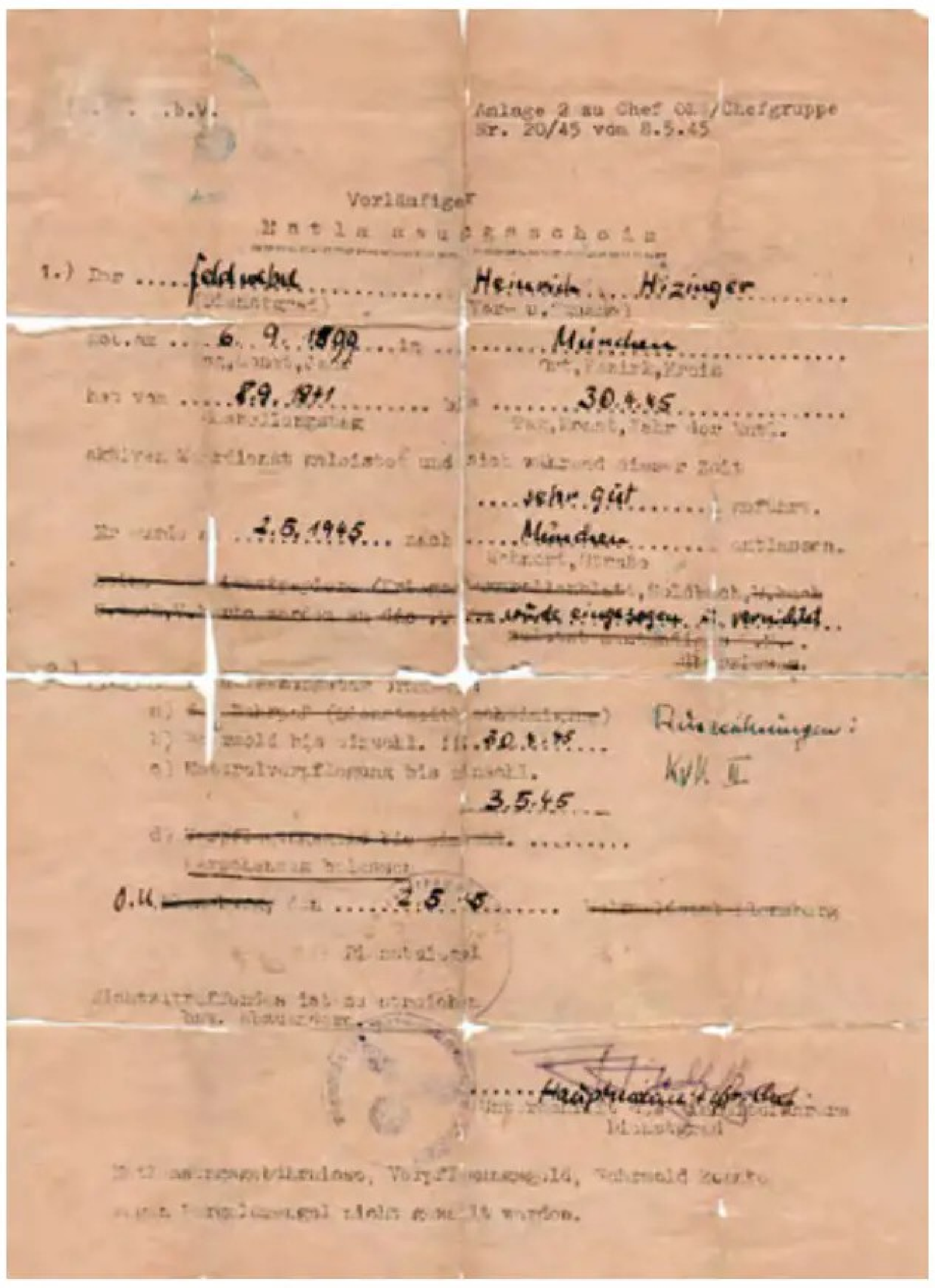
Room Three offers a dive into the capabilities of military intelligence, expanding upon the 24 thematic 'toolkits' of intelligence gathering and analysis

A display focused on Signals Intelligence or SIGNIT, one of the 24 toolkits discussed within the museum

A display covering intelligence work in Northern Ireland during The Troubles

From there, guests are introduced to the 24 thematic intelligence toolkits, ranging from the historically familiar imagery analysis, photographic interpretation and deception, to contemporary specialisms such as cyber, signature (MASINT) and technical intelligence. Bill explained: "By structuring our museum around these themes, our underlying message is that military intelligence is far more diverse and technical than popular culture's fixation on James Bond and the work of Bletchley Park."

Two well-known historic military intelligence groups are explored in this room, the first being the Special Operations Executive (SOE) and its work during World War Two, supplemented by a full-sized parachute container of the type used to deliver agents' supplies into occupied Europe. The second explores the role of BRIXMIS, the British Commanders-in-Chief's Mission to the Soviet Forces in Germany during the Cold War, which ventured beyond the Iron Curtain from its West Berlin base.



Anlage 2 zu Chef OK /Chefgruppe
Nr. 20/45 vom 8.5.45

Vorläufiger

1.) Der ....Feldwebel.................. Heinrich ... Hizinger.........

geb. am ...6. 9. 1899...in ....München..................

hat vom .....1.9. 1941........... bis ....30.4.45...............

....sehr gut.........

Er wurde am ...2.5.1945... nach .....München.......... entlassen.

3.5.45

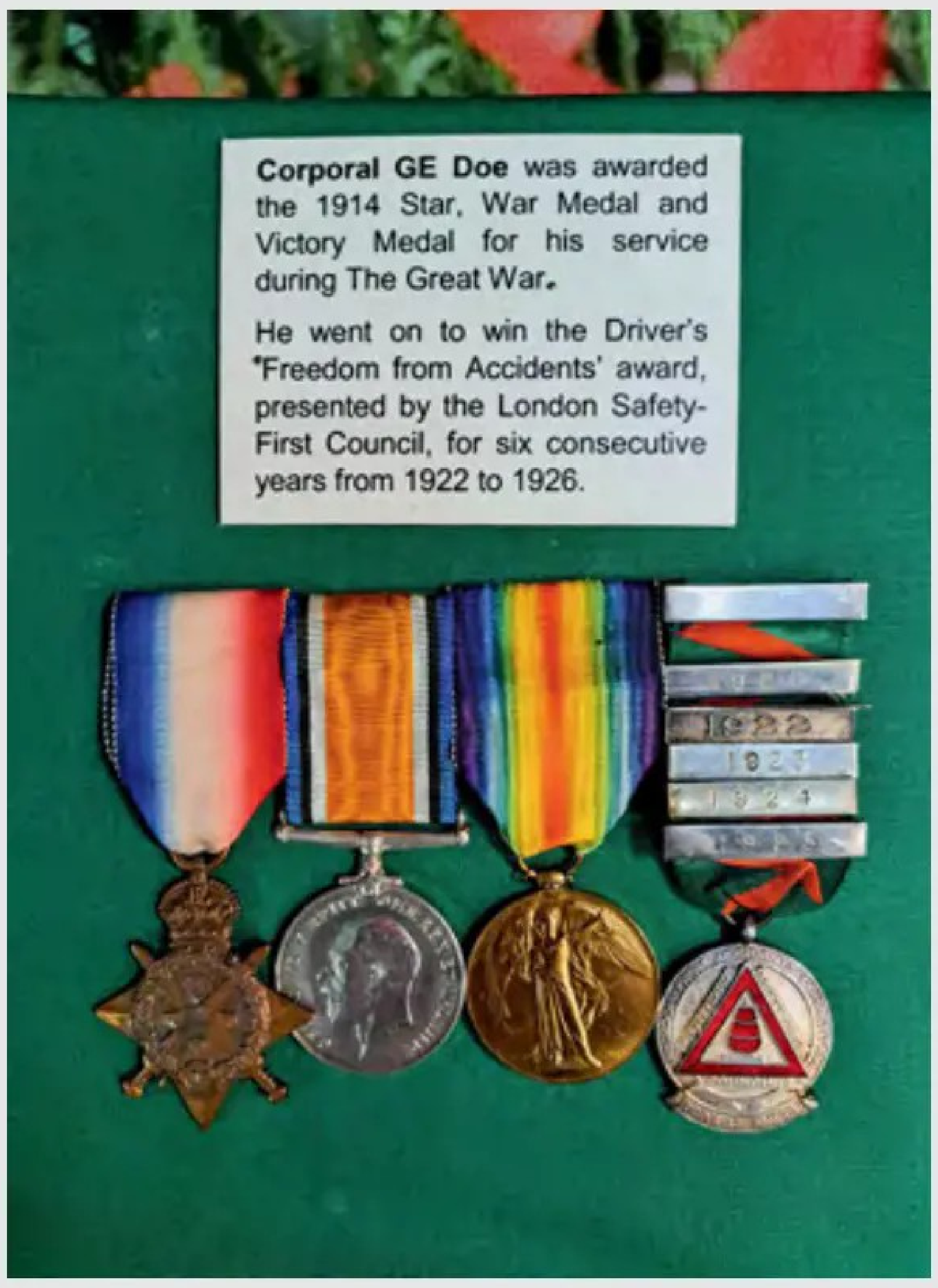
2.5.45

The forged identity document belonging to 'Heinrich Hitzinger'. Sergeant Arthur Britton's application of the Intelligence Cycle unmasked Hitzinger as Himmler

Moving into Room Two, visitors are presented with a space dedicated to the Intelligence Corps of the British Army. Although the unit's history is traced chronologically from the Napoleonic era onwards, its existence was not a continuous one. Bill said: "Army

Curator's favourite

"In our Medals, Honours and Awards exhibit, I like to place two medal sets side by side. Brigadier John Charteris, CMG, DSO – Field Marshal Haig's Chief of Intelligence in World War One – has an impressive spread weighing half-a-tonne! Beside it is Corporal G E Doe's three basic medals of the war, 'Pip', 'Squeak' and 'Wilfred', plus a Driver's Freedom From Accidents medal for not crashing as a bus driver post-war. The contrast between the highly decorated senior officer and the ordinary John Doe always makes me smile."



Corporal GE Doe was awarded the 1914 Star, War Medal and Victory Medal for his service during The Great War.

He went on to win the Driver's 'Freedom from Accidents' award, presented by the London Safety-First Council, for six consecutive years from 1922 to 1926.

Intelligence was typically disbanded after each major conflict. It was not until July 1940 that the Intelligence Corps was officially created by Army Order 112 and, unlike prior wars, was not disbanded following VE/VJ day."

This room is an important space for Intelligence Corps officers and enlisted men undergoing training at Chicksands, serving as a repository for fostering ethos, traditions and lessons learned. Displays and cabinets chart the unit's activities during World War One, while a large exhibit houses dozens of medals and honours awarded to Intelligence Corps personnel. Particularly moving is the nearby interactive remembrance display, which commemorates every member lost on operations since the unit's reformation in 1940, including those from the East and West African, Indian and Burmese Intelligence Corps. A further section examines the integration of women into the corps, noting that they have worked in vital intelligence roles from World War One onwards.

Imagery Intelligence or IMINT is one of the toolkits discussed in Room Four

Rooms Four and Five house the Medmenham Collection, which focuses on imagery analysis and photographic interpretation

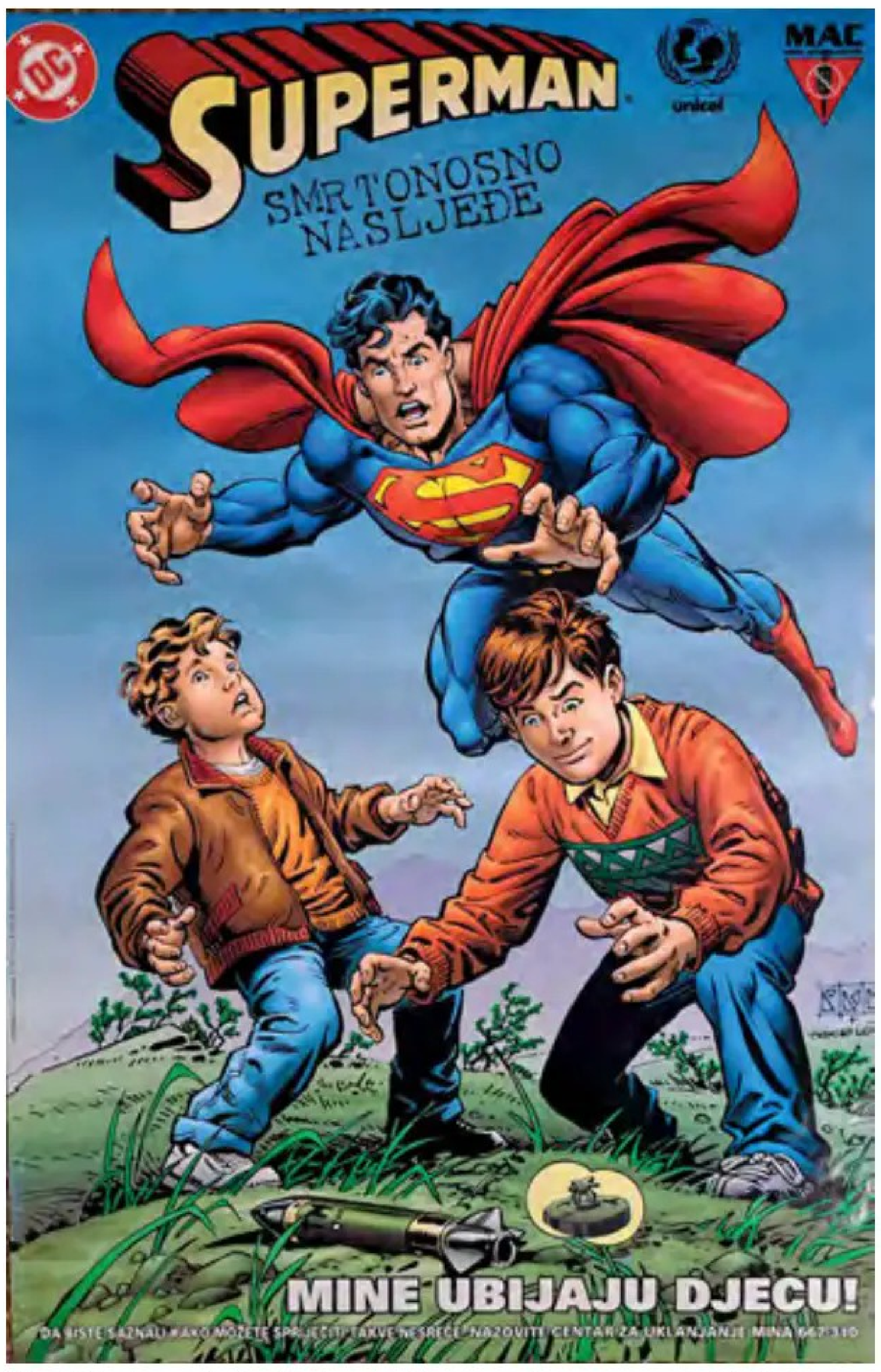
Room Three offers a dive into the capabilities and methods of military intelligence, expanding upon the thematic 'toolkits' introduced in Room One. Displays on language and cultural expertise sit alongside sections on psychological operations and propaganda, while another examines the history of signals intelligence at Chicksands itself – once a vital Y Service listening station during World War Two. Exploitation services are also examined, with an emphasis on the utilisation of forensic evidence recovered from the battlefield.

One notable exhibit within Room Three examines the complexities of modern military intelligence gathering, using the NATO Balkan campaign of the 1990s as a case study to depict the multifaceted challenges of politics, cultures and logistics. One artefact from the campaign is a psychological operations poster sponsored by DC Comics and the United Nations, depicting Superman warning children not to touch unexploded ordnance. However, it backfired, as Bill noted: "This artefact illustrates that you have to think like the target audience if you intend to influence them. The poster failed, as Balkan kids ended up lingering around UXOs waiting for Superman to turn up! They had failed to think like seven-year-olds!"

Alongside a display focused on the capture of Himmler, Room Three houses a temporary exhibition dedicated to The Race for Trieste in 1945. This examines the city's post-war political uncertainty: whether it should belong to Italy, Austria or Yugoslavia, and the intelligence work carried out amid a volatile mix of espionage, propaganda and competing national claims.

Rooms Four and Five house the Medmenham Collection, which focuses on imagery analysis and photographic interpretation. Named after the RAF Photographic Reconnaissance Unit of World War Two, the rooms are rich with three-dimensional viewing aids, photographs, maps and models, all illustrating the evolution of visual intelligence gathering.

The Military Intelligence Museum reveals how disciplined observation, careful analysis and decisive action have shaped outcomes in British conflicts past and present. For those prepared to make the journey and secure the necessary booking, this site offers a rare insight into a world where the smallest clue has the potential to shift the course of history.



The failed psychological operations poster sponsored by DC Comics and the United Nations for the NATO Balkan campaign

Visitor information

The Military Intelligence Museum is open Tuesday to Friday, 10am to 4pm. As it is located on an active base, visits are by appointment only and require three days' notice.

Admission: Free
Address: Military Intelligence Museum, Chicksands, Shefford, Bedfordshire SG17 5PR
What3words location: boater.validated.coining
Closest station: Bedford Station (9.6 miles)
Tel: 01462 814643
Email: visits-intelligencemuseum@outlook.com
Web: militaryintelligencemuseum.org

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IMAGE *of* WAR

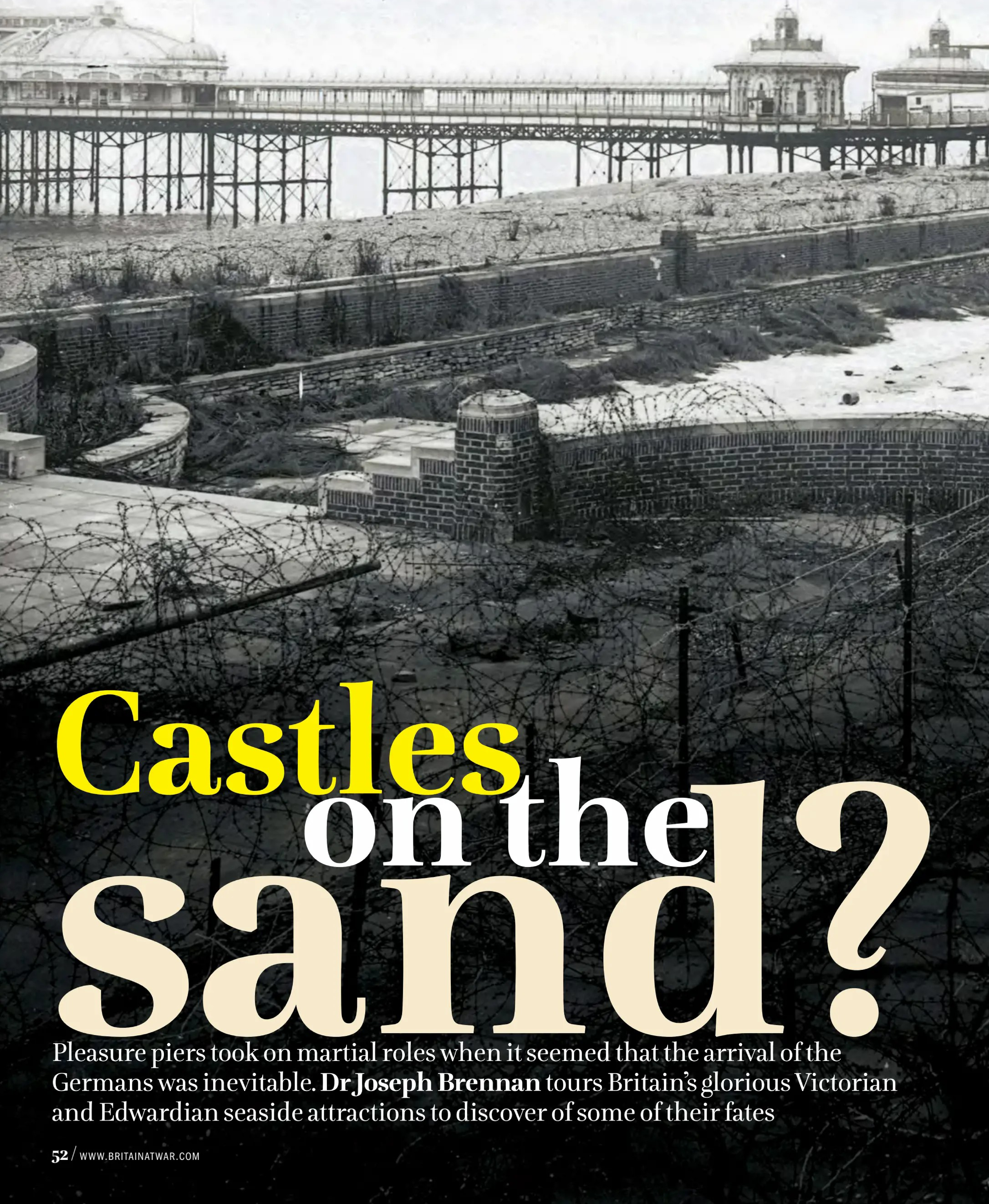
East meets West

Operation Chessman, Malbork, Poland, June 11, 2025

Four NATO aircraft fly in formation over Poland during Operation Chessman, part of the NATO enhanced air policing mission in eastern Europe. The four-month deployment that ended in August 2025 involved Typhoon FGR.4s from several RAF squadrons in roulement to Poland, it was a busy mission climaxing with the scrambling of FGR-4s six times in a six-day period to intercept 15 Russian aircraft. Shown here (from front): a Polish MiG-29 Fulcrum-A (with AA-11 Archer missile training rounds and a scheme honouring Kapitan Pilot Ludwik Paszkiewicz, a Polish ace killed flying for the RAF in the Battle of Britain), Polish F-16C Block 52 (with AIM-9 Sidewinder and AIM-120 AMRAAM missiles and sporting the 'Raven' Polish Air Force centenary scheme), RAF Typhoon FGR.4 (with a Litening targeting pod and AIM-132 ASRAAM missile) and a Gripen C from NATO's newest member, Sweden (with a Litening pod, Meteor missile and IRIS-T missile training round).

CPL JAKE HOBBS RAF/MOD

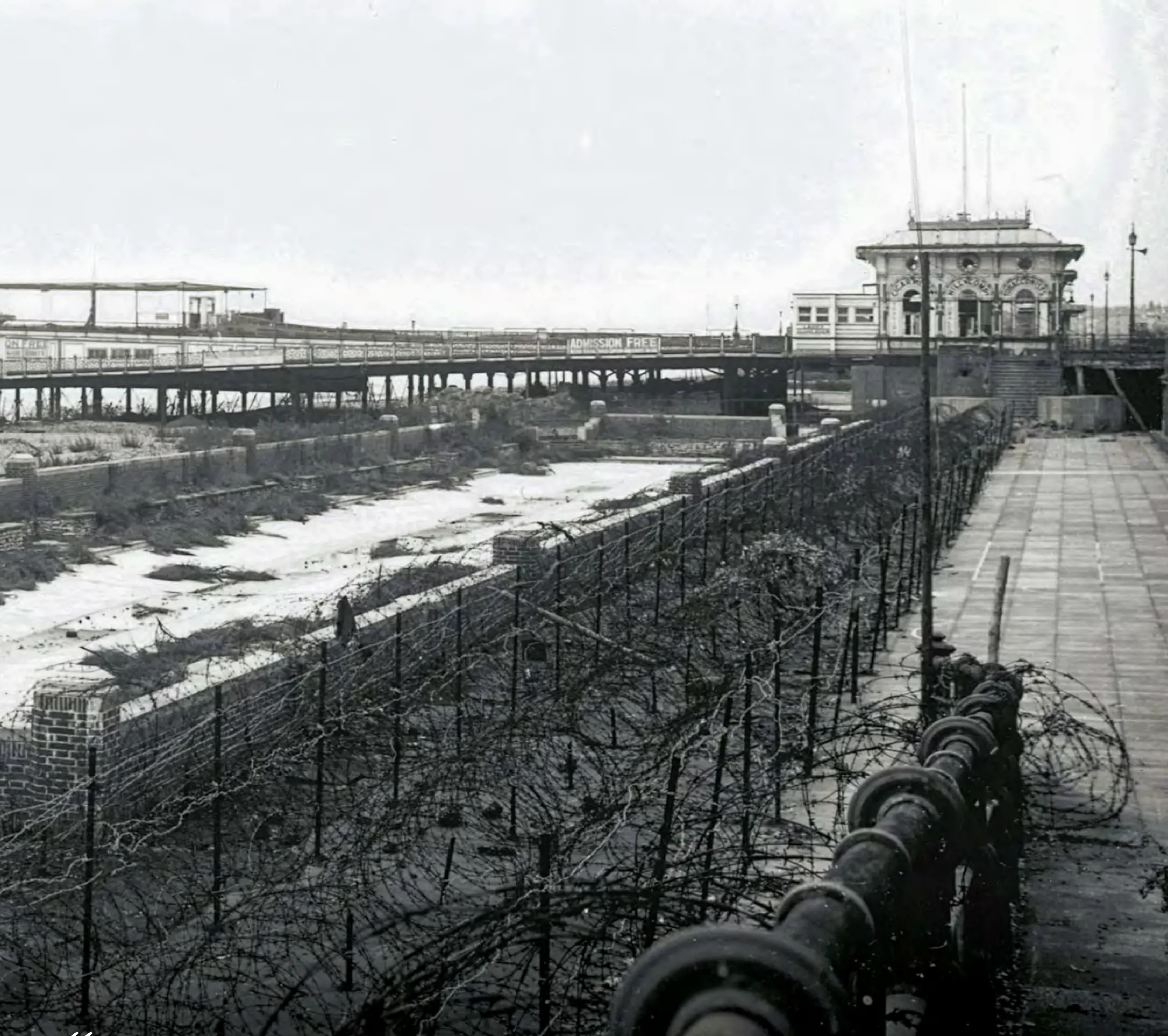
264
377
WX
4047
108
SZKOLNY
kpt. pil. Ludwik Paszkiewicz



Brighton beach and West Pier during World War Two, showing barricades moving west along the King's Road. The British retreat from Dunkirk and the French surrender left the south coast exposed. Brighton's beaches were closed at 5pm on July 2, 1940, and defences installed including mines and barbed wire
BRIGHTON & HOVE MUSEUMS

Castles on the sand?

Pleasure piers took on martial roles when it seemed that the arrival of the Germans was inevitable. **Dr Joseph Brennan** tours Britain's glorious Victorian and Edwardian seaside attractions to discover of some of their fates



"The enemy began to fire cannon along the beaches, by which alone shipping could approach or depart. They sowed magnetic mines in the channels and the seas and sent repeated waves of hostile aircraft, sometimes more than 100 strong, to cast bombs on a single pier that remained and on the sand dunes," so said Prime Minister Winston Churchill in an address delivered to the House of Commons on June 4, 1940. It was the height of "Britain's darkest hour" when, according to the PM, "the enemy attacked on all sides in great strength and fierceness, and their main power, air force, was thrown into the battle."

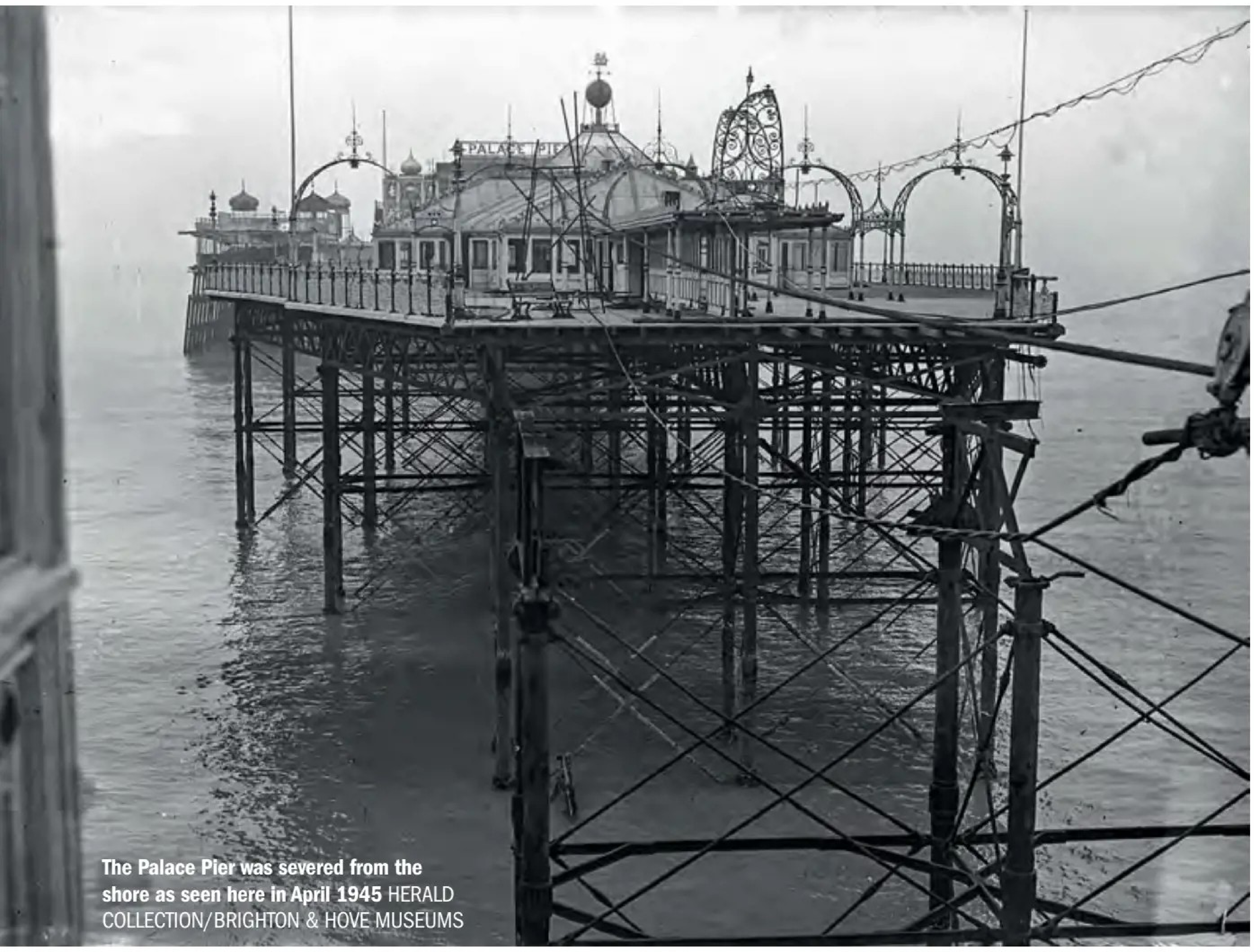
Pleasure piers, a great British invention, were plentiful going into World War Two but less so afterwards. As part of Britain's anti-invasion efforts, piers across the south coast of England – seen as potentially able to be perverted into platforms for invasion troops – were blocked, severed from the mainland and, in some cases, destroyed, while others were drafted into use for the war effort and became targets for the Luftwaffe. The lucky ones that survived the war needed to wait until the late 1940s or into the 1950s to receive repairs. Less fortunate were those never restored, eventually succumbing to storms or the wrecking ball.

A tour of the invasion coast

By the end of June 1940, the Chiefs of Staff suggested, through General Hastings Ismay, that Winston Churchill visit threatened sections of the east and south coasts of England. Churchill devoted a day or two every week to this task, writing in *Their Finest Hour*, the second volume of his history of the war, that he spent the time "sleeping when necessary in my train, where I had every facility for carrying on my regular work and was in constant contact with Whitehall."

One of Churchill's earliest visits was to the 3rd Infantry Division, commanded by General Bernard Montgomery and stationed near Brighton, which had been poised to sail for France just as French resistance collapsed. This was the first time Churchill and Montgomery would meet face to face. Monty had his HQ near Steyning in West Sussex and used the visit to demonstrate a flanking movement of his Universal Carriers. Following the exercise,

> ***"I was amused to see a platoon of the Grenadier Guards making a sandbag machine gun post in one of the kiosks of the pier, like those where in my childhood I had often admired the antics of the performing fleas"***
>
> WINSTON CHURCHILL, IN THEIR FINEST HOUR



The Palace Pier was severed from the shore as seen here in April 1945 HERALD COLLECTION/BRIGHTON & HOVE MUSEUMS

Churchill described how the pair had travelled along the coast through Shoreham and Hove "to the familiar Brighton front, of which I had so many schoolboy memories."

Dining at the Royal Albion Hotel on the footplate of Brighton pier, Churchill recalled: "The hotel was entirely empty, a great deal of evacuation having taken place; but there were still a number of people airing themselves on the beaches or the parade. I was amused to see a platoon of the Grenadier Guards making a sandbag machine gun post in one of the kiosks of the pier, like those where in my childhood I had often admired the antics of the performing fleas."

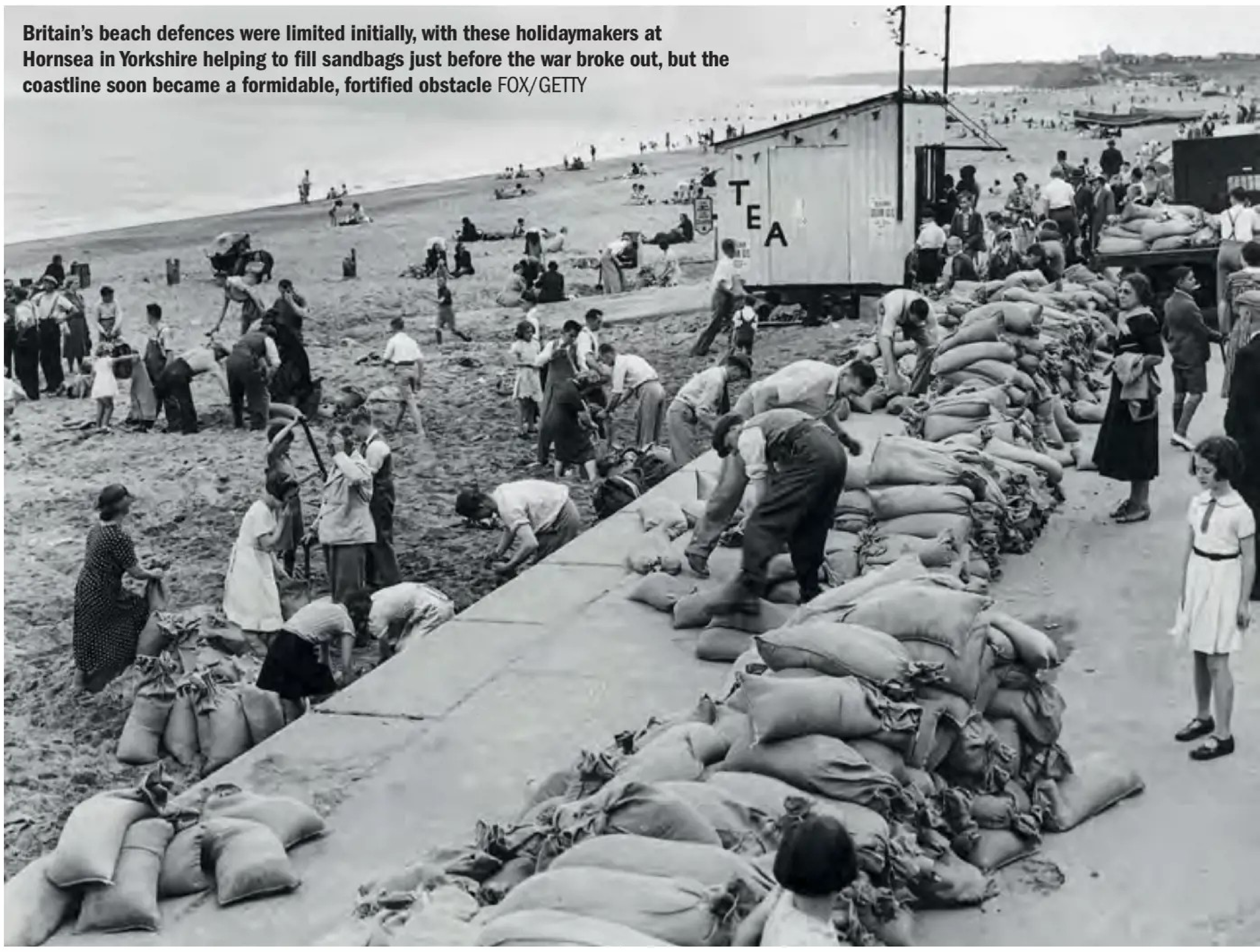
During his Brighton visit, Churchill – as much as he enjoyed the weather and good talks with Monty – was perturbed to find the 3rd Division spread along 30 miles of coast. What Churchill had wanted to see was a more held-back concentration in reserve, ready to strike against any "serious head of invasion." Returning to Brighton pier, he noted that the Royal Albion provided an ideal vantage point for pierhead activities.

For fans of *Dad's Army*, Churchill's comments might conjure up memories of *Menace from the Deep* (episode ten of season three), first aired on November 13, 1969. In this, the platoon finds itself marooned on a severed pierhead in the fictional resort of Walmington-on-Sea – the kinds of antics that ensue are not unlike those Churchill witnessed at Brighton. And, no coincidence, either. With the threat of invasion, pierheads came to be seen as potential launchpads for the enemy to gain a foothold.

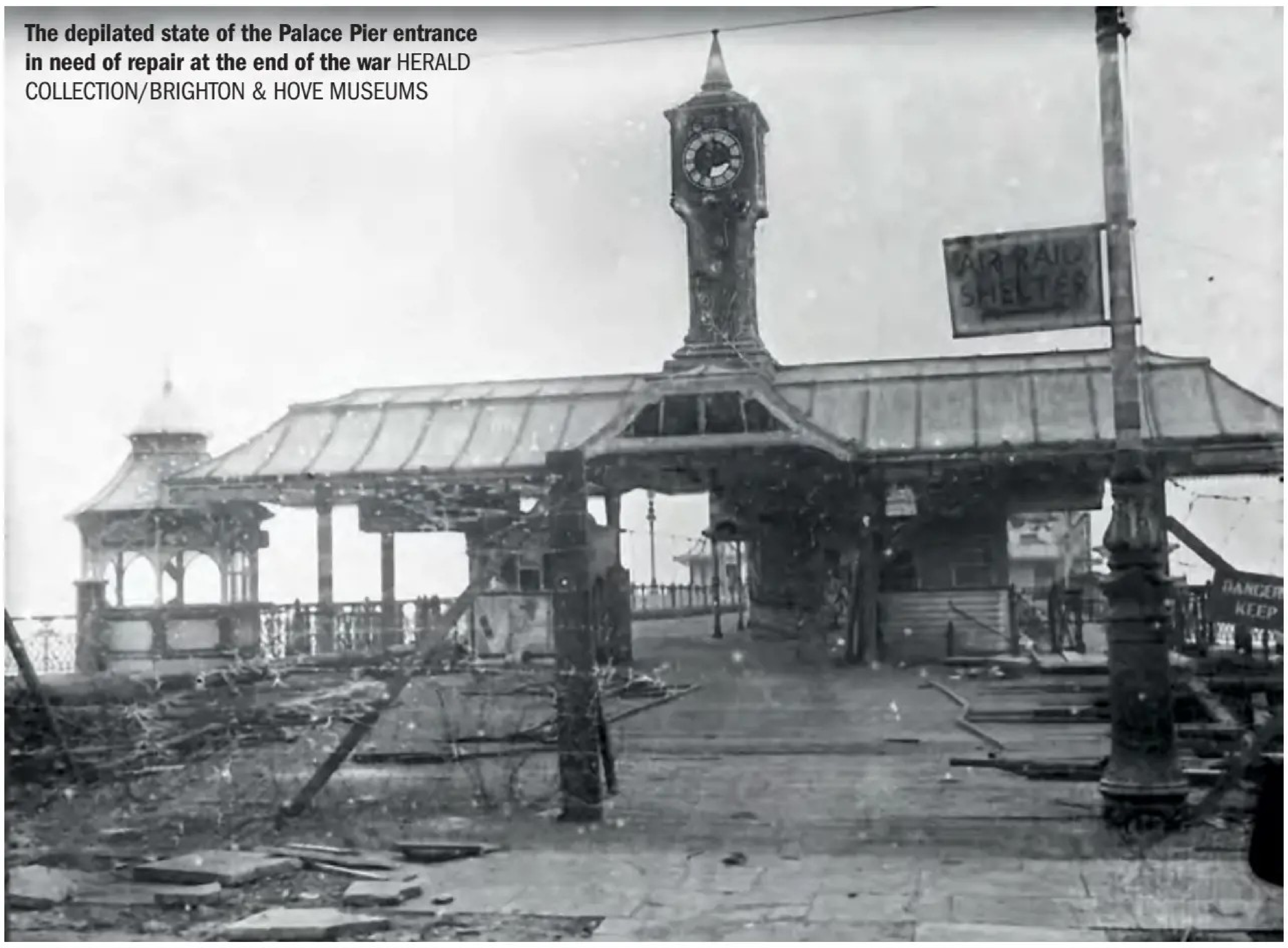
The significance of the piers system at 'London-on-Sea' was self-evident. The one that Churchill could see from the Royal Albion was the Grade II-listed Palace Pier, which had been extended, as fate would have it, in 1938. It was damaged during the war and reopened in 1946. But Brighton had more than one pier – three over its history and two during the conflict. Aside from Palace, there was also the Grade I-listed West Pier (now a ruin and victim of heritage crime), which had its central decking removed during the war and suffered an inadvertent hit from an RAF fighter in 1944. Indeed, both Brighton's piers were severed from the mainland, as revealed by Luftwaffe reconnaissance.

Stretched along the coast between the piers were barbed wire, roadblocks and 'dragons' teeth' to thwart any amphibious assault. There were pillboxes, too, including one built into the landward end of West Pier and demolished only recently. Hits from the air were a constant threat. As

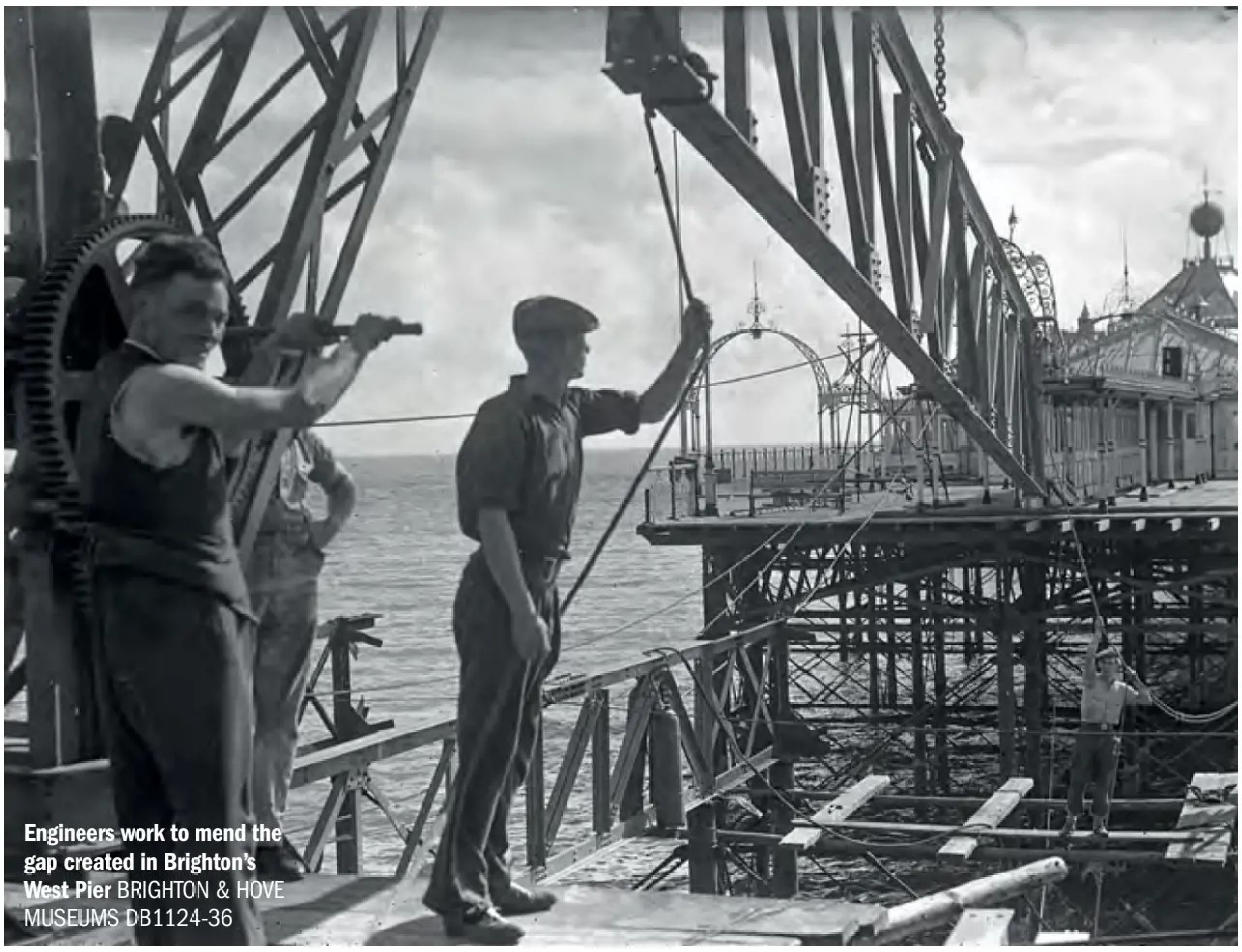
A soldier at the Palace Pier in Brighton checks his Lewis gun magazine BRIGHTON & HOVE MUSEUMS



Britain's beach defences were limited initially, with these holidaymakers at Hornsea in Yorkshire helping to fill sandbags just before the war broke out, but the coastline soon became a formidable, fortified obstacle FOX/GETTY



The depilated state of the Palace Pier entrance in need of repair at the end of the war HERALD COLLECTION/BRIGHTON & HOVE MUSEUMS



Engineers work to mend the gap created in Brighton's West Pier BRIGHTON & HOVE MUSEUMS DB1124-36

Churchill wrote in 1940: "Piers, beaches, and shipping [were] rendered unusable by air attack, and also by artillery fire from the southwest." Many piers suffered damage and not all of them would reopen. Fearing invasion, partial demolition – usually the removal of central decking – was a common fate, with detachments of Royal Engineers dispatched to breach them. Reportedly, Eastbourne, Hastings and St Leonards were among the first to come under the Royal Engineers' remit, in 1940.

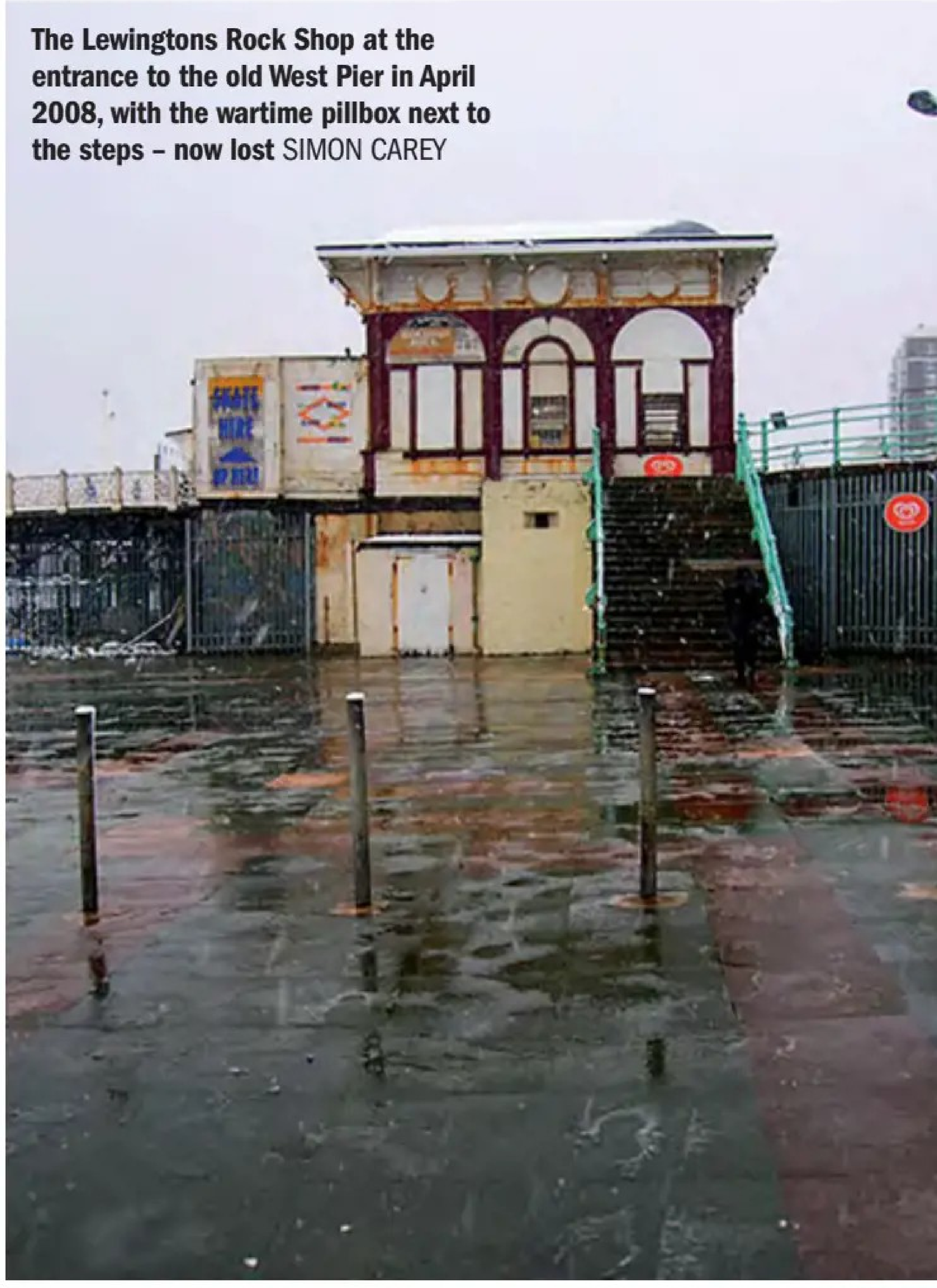
The lost and severed

Eugenius Birch is generally considered as Britain's foremost pier designer, responsible for 14 of them, including Brighton's West Pier. The Grade II-listed Eastbourne pier is one of his creations. Opened in June 1870, and measuring 1,000ft long and 52ft wide, it was lucky to be spared a wartime order to blow it up. However, the central section wooden decking on cast iron screwpiles was removed to prevent landings and gun platforms were installed in the 1901-dated theatre, with a large, domed roof and a smaller cupola that contained a 'camera obscura.' The pier also had a bandstand on one of the projecting wings, which was removed in 1945. Post-war concrete slabs were installed instead of wooden decking. The theatre was destroyed by fire in 1970.

Another Birch design, Hastings Pier, dates from 1872 and suffered much in its lifetime, including a devastating fire in 2010. Listed at Grade II, its war years included closure and bomb damage. However, it was one of the lucky piers to be renovated post-war, with the West View and East View solaria added in 1951 and 1956, respectively. At St Leonards, another St George-Moore pier sustained damage in a 1940 bombing that was deemed too costly to address and it was demolished in 1951. Steel girders removed from the pier during the war were used to strengthen defences elsewhere, including gun positions in Rye.

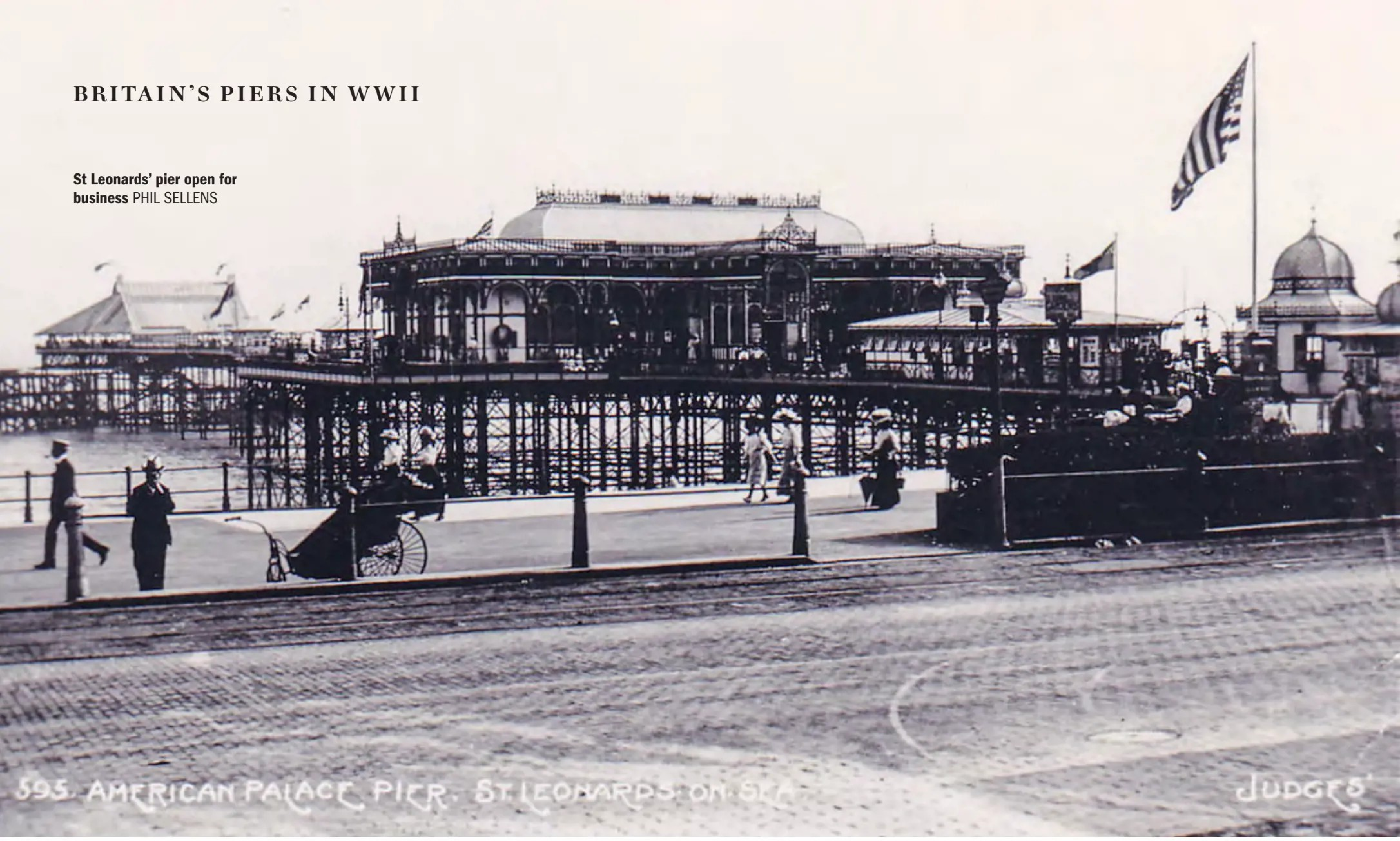
South Parade Pier in Portsmouth – being an important naval target – was partially dismantled to frustrate invasion plans. The city's second pier, Clarence Pier – which unusually runs along the coast rather than stretching out to sea – was also damaged by bombing. In certain cases, precautions were more absolute, such as at Tollesbury, in Essex, destroyed in 1939. All that remains today are its pillars and a pillbox.

On the south side of the entrance to the Thames, Herne Bay – another site of strategic importance – had Britain's second-longest pier. This was severed, later repaired and now has its landing stage isolated once more, a lingering reminder, 80 years on from the end of the war, of the reshaping hand of the conflict. For some piers, severing, while less deliberate, came with a more finite fate. The iron Deal Pier, built in 1864 to a Birch design, was severely damaged in January 1940 when struck by the Dutch ship *Nora*. Churchill subsequently authorised its demolition, which left just the shore-side toll house (itself demolished in 1954). The present Deal Pier, made of concrete-clad steel to a Sir W Halcrow & Partners' design, dates



The Lewingtons Rock Shop at the entrance to the old West Pier in April 2008, with the wartime pillbox next to the steps – now lost SIMON CAREY

St Leonards' pier open for business PHIL SELLENS



from 1957 and came about as a result of compensation the Deal Corporation received for the wartime damage.

On a happier note, some piers were spared the Luftwaffe's wrath and Churchill's precautions. Blackpool is a notable example, where evidence in the form of German-marked aerial photography have suggested that Hitler spared the town with the intention of repurposing it as a Nazi resort in occupation. From a home-front vantage, Blackpool's position on the west coast made it less a potential invasion site. Instead, its hotels were requisitioned as beds for evacuees and those in convalescence. Blackpool also turned itself into military barracks, housing the RAF, who trained there and were later joined by Americans and European allies.

Peake's pier

Yet the history of Britain's piers is not entirely a story of what was lost. There are also tales of bravery and creative reuse:

See how the sick kingfishers take the air! –
In brilliance past the Southport pier
Yet we are shapeless in our azure suits
Which hang in monstrous folds. Around our throats
The twisted snakes of fire burn all day long,
And tenderness recoils from our preposterous boots.

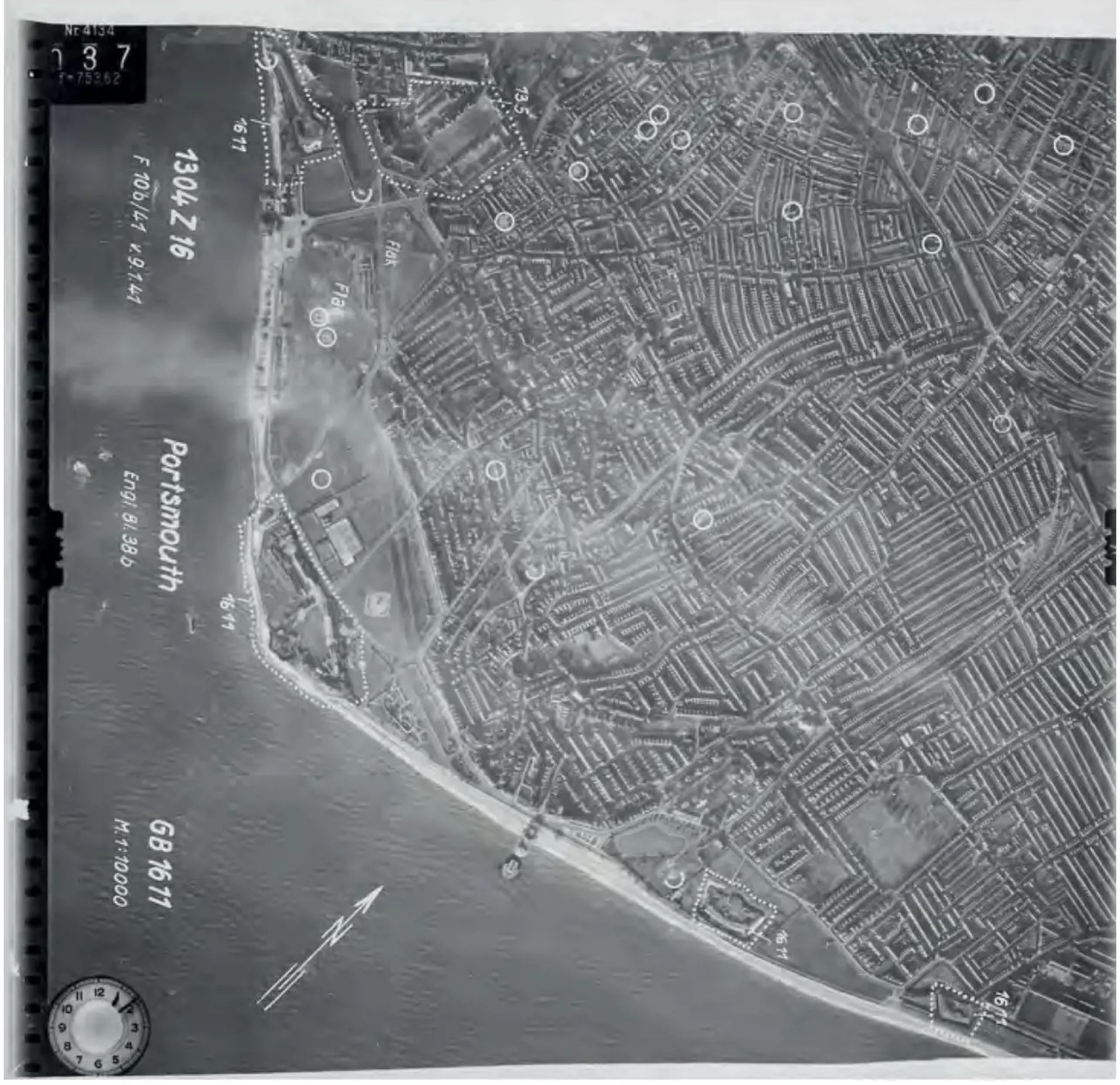
> *"Some piers were spared both the Luftwaffe's wrath and Churchill's precautions. Blackpool is a notable example, where evidence suggests Hitler spared the town with the intention of repurposing it as a Nazi resort"*

So reads an excerpt from Mervyn Peake's poem, *Blue as the Indigo and Fabulous Storm*, penned in 1942. Critics have read the poem in light of Peake's admission to the Convalescent and Sea-Bathing Hospital, a wartime emergency hospital, in Southport in spring 1942. Peake had come to convalesce following a breakdown while serving at a camp near Clitheroe.

The hospital windows offered a vista of the vast Southport sands, past the

The pillbox and remains of Tollesbury pier in 2013 TREVOR HARRIS

RIGHT: **A German reconnaissance photograph of South Parade Pier, Portsmouth, taken in January 1941. Bomb hits are ringed, air-defence positions labelled, and targets marked. The pier has been severed from the shore** US NATIONAL ARCHIVES

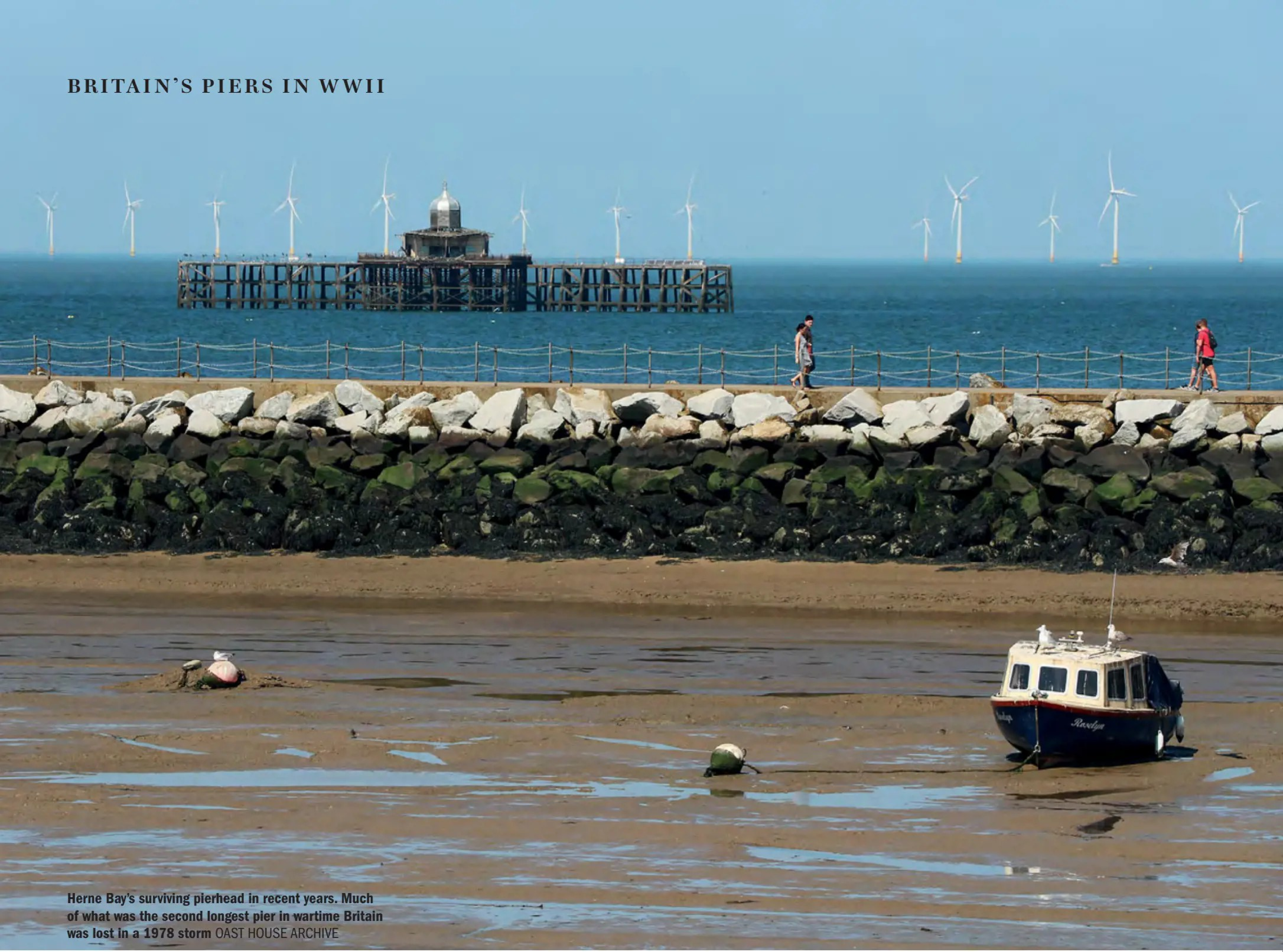


promenade and artificial lake to the pier that spanned it. A stroll behind the hospital, along Lord Street, takes you along a tree-lined shopping avenue said to have inspired the future Emperor Napoleon III to fill the centre of Paris with spacious boulevards. "At any other time, Peake might have liked Southport," Peake scholar R W Maslen writes, "but its brightness came to him at a time of emotional and intellectual crisis, and the works of art he produced there are as anguished as they are beautiful."

Army life had driven Peake – who later became a war artist – to the edge due to his "perpetual frustration" at its "wastefulness", as he described in a letter to art critic Sir Kenneth Clark. After "two years of trivial routine", he was "sick, sick, sick of it" he told childhood friend Gordon Smith: "The perpetual littleness of the life – the monotonous conversation of what I suppose are my comrades who are with me polishing buttons and Blancoing the webbing in our fight against world tyranny... I just want to cry when I think of the stupidity of the whole bloody, ghastly, sordid business."

HERNE BAY. GRAND PIER PAVILION.

Herne Bay pier's Grand Pavillion in a storm pre-war
FRED C PALMER



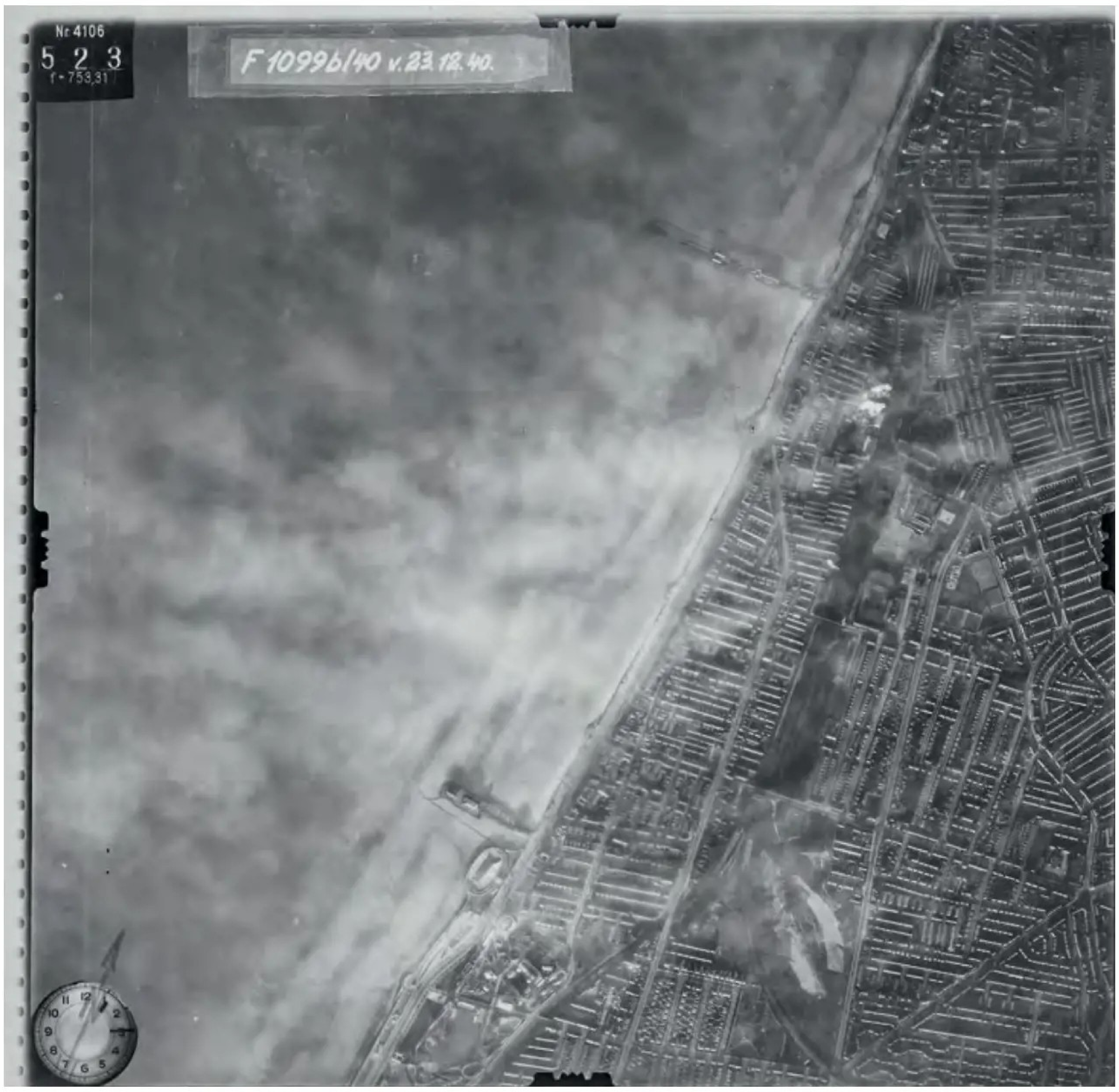
Herne Bay's surviving pierhead in recent years. Much of what was the second longest pier in wartime Britain was lost in a 1978 storm OAST HOUSE ARCHIVE

Designed by James Brunlees and dating from 1859-60, the Southport pierhead and pavilion were destroyed by fire in 1933. The Grade II listed structure closed during the war, but was not severed from the shore and instead went on the offensive, housing searchlights to target aircraft approaching the Liverpool docks. Now Britain's second longest pier, it survives today, though closed and in desperate need of restoration – it caught fire in September 2025.

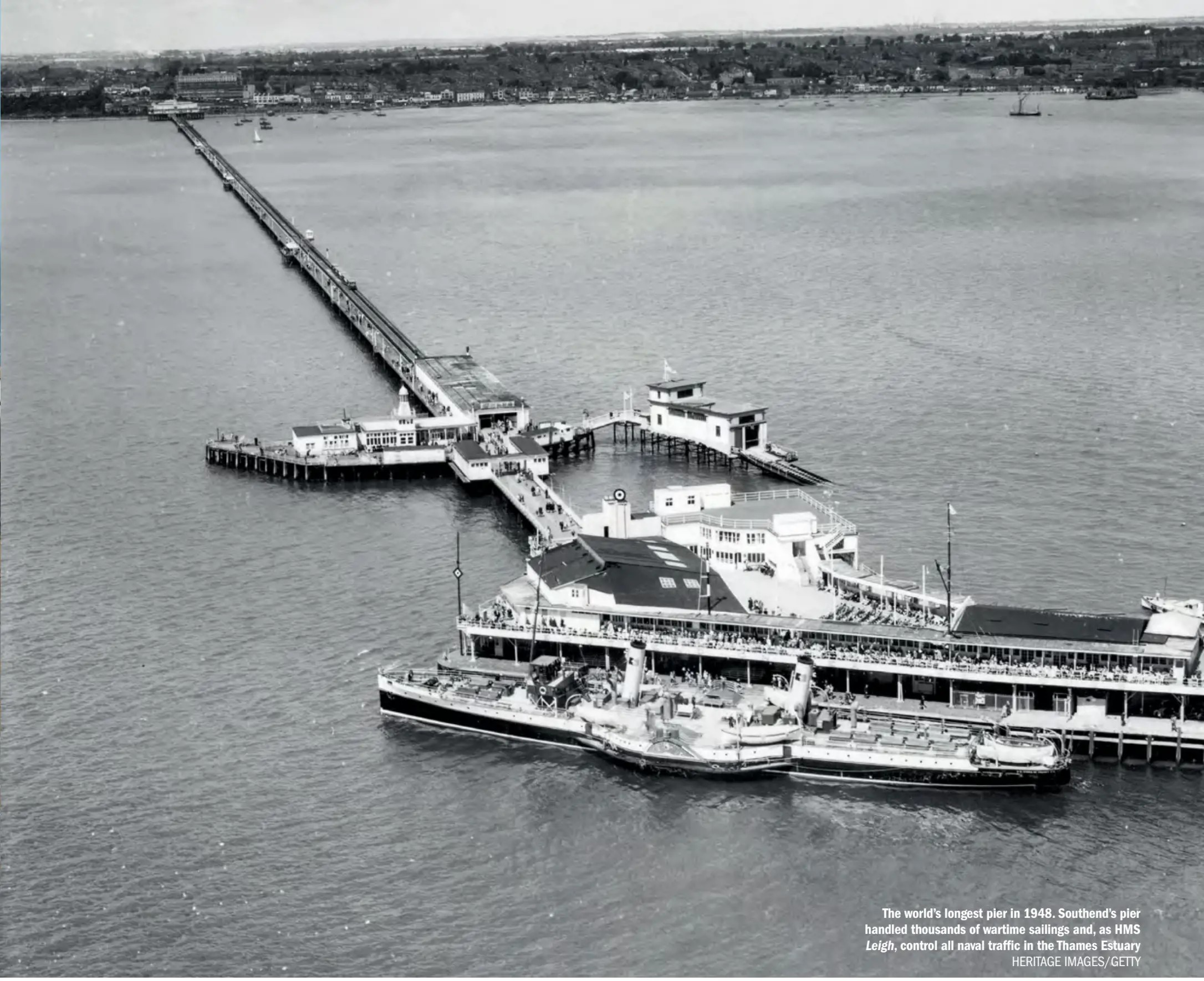
The hero pier

Pre-war, piers had been places of merriment and entertainment, so their newfound martial status formed quite the contrast

At Southend-on-Sea in Essex is the longest pleasure pier in the world. Another Brunlees creation and Grade II-listed, it dates from 1889, though the superstructure is now mostly 20th Century. It stretches 1.34 miles into the Thames Estuary and was Britain's most important pier in the war effort. It was from here that, in 1938, 2,000 members of the British Legion "braved the perils of the deep" in a gesture of solidarity to the Czechs by offering to police Sudetenland following



RIGHT: **A German reconnaissance photograph from December 1940 showing Blackpool's unsevered Central Pier**
US NATIONAL ARCHIVES



The world's longest pier in 1948. Southend's pier handled thousands of wartime sailings and, as HMS *Leigh*, control all naval traffic in the Thames Estuary
HERITAGE IMAGES/GETTY

its annexation by Germany as part of the Munich Agreement, as Lieutenant-Colonel Granville Baker recounted in *The Cavalry Journal*. The ex-troops had assembled at the pier to be transferred to ships to carry them to Sudetenland only for the treaty to collapse, making war all but inevitable.

During the war-proper, Southend Pier would welcome many more troops for onward passage. Used as a muster point for convoys and as a means to move men to and from overseas theatres, by the end of the war, the pier had dispatched some 84,297 sailings in 3,367 convoys. One account, published in *Punch* in 1944, reads: "In the spring of 1940, you thrust your way down to the broad rough reaches at the other end, and saw Southend Pier, and met the enemy. You looked a little small down there, and many a boisterous day they said that you would sink, but you didn't."

Another account by Godfrey Winn in *On Going to the Wars* (1941), reads: "Rows and rows of pivot chairs, lashed to the floor, waiting for the guests that could no longer arrive. On the mantelpiece, a clock ticks away, ticks away, as we wait off Southend Pier..." One more chronicler, Ernest Watkins in *No Depression in Iceland* (1942), makes reference to a pillbox at Southend pier. These were not uncommon fixtures as part of the defence preparations of Britain's piers, another notable example being the aforementioned one on Palace Pier in Brighton.

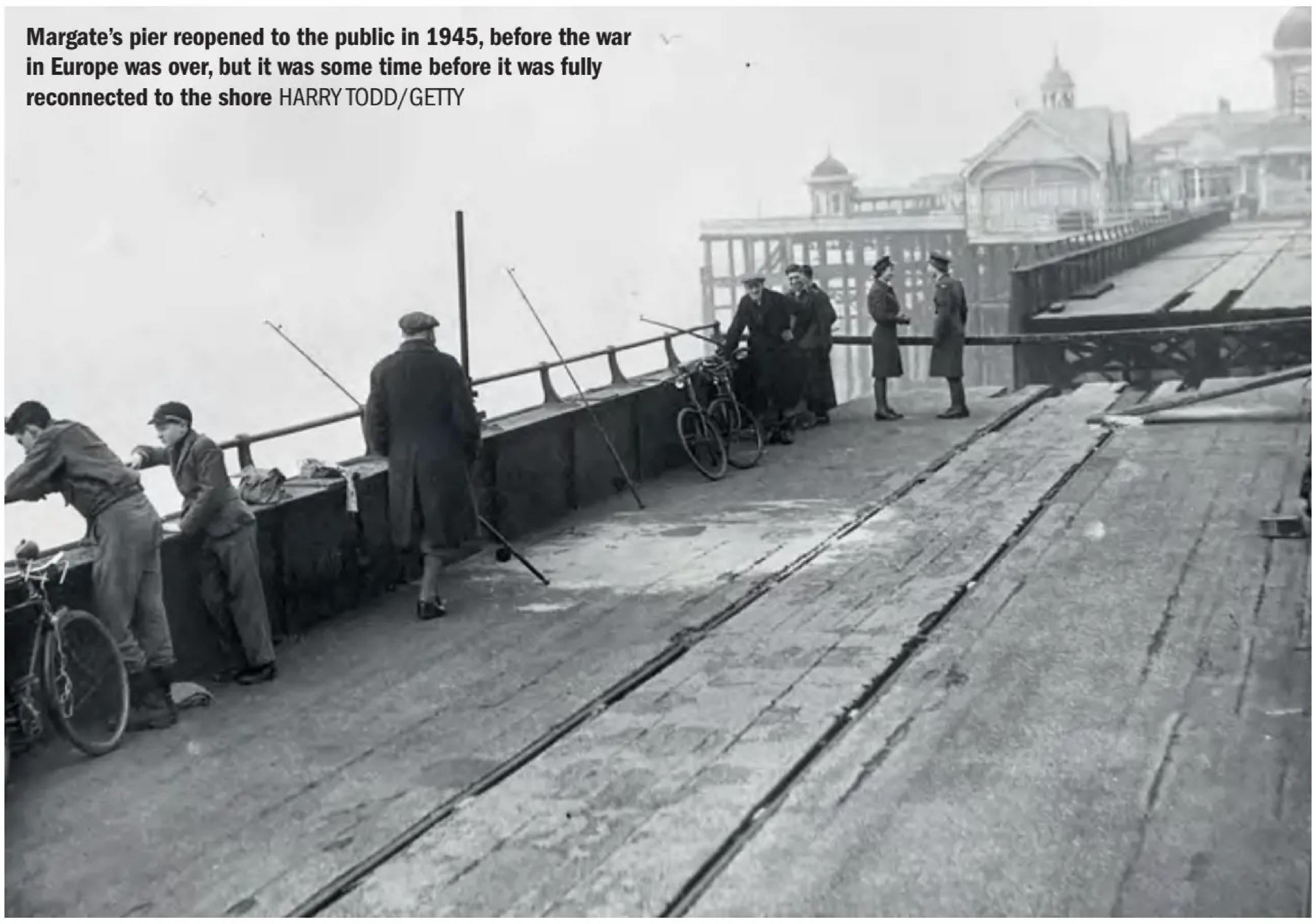
But as vital as Southend pier was to the war effort, it was more than a convoy mustering point. With a militarised Southend Pier in the north, an army-occupied Herne Bay Pier in the south and the Maunsell Sea Forts in between, the Thames Estuary presented a formidable barrier to a potential German invasion.

Southend pier also doubled as the Naval Control Centre for the Thames Estuary and was given the name HMS *Leigh*. From here, all wartime Thames traffic was co-ordinated, including preparations for D-Day. In this role Southend pier was highly successful, although it was hit in bombing raids. Five miles away, the SS *Richard Montgomery* ran aground in 1944. It can still be seen at low tide off near Sheerness in Kent and continues to pose a risk to shipping as, according to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, there are approximately 1,400 tonnes of ordnance contained within the ship's forward holds.

Southend was witness to other shipping strife during the course of the war – not surprising given the number of vessels to call at her. In one case, a wreck was the cause of calamity when, on January 8, 1941, the 439ft *Jersey*, coming to anchor off Southend, struck the submerged the remains of the *Kinnaird Head* and } sustained considerable damage.

Also serving troops was Margate pier, a Birch creation dating from 1856. It was extended in 1875-1878 and an entertainment pavilion was built at the pierhead. It was used for troop and supply movements during the war, including the evacuation of Dunkirk, as detailed in Edward Keble Chatterton's 1941 book *The Epic of Dunkirk*. Closed in 1976 on safety grounds, it was virtually destroyed by a storm on January 11, 1978. All that was left was an isolated pierhead, removed in the early 1980s.

A debate in the House of Commons on November 18, 1946, concerning German preparations for a 1940 invasion,



Margate's pier reopened to the public in 1945, before the war in Europe was over, but it was some time before it was fully reconnected to the shore HARRY TODD/GETTY

> *"The price that Britain's piers paid for preparedness was steep - greater than, in certain cases, any repairs that the post-war era of austerity could afford"*

pinpointed landings by 25 divisions – ten in the first four days to form the initial bridgehead. Identified as the site of the landings was the stretch of coast between Folkestone and Worthing, along which many piers could be found.

The damage enacted all around Britain's shores of its historical piers – especially those on the south coast – as part of anti-invasion measures was great, all in service to what Churchill, on May 19, 1940, called a "readiness for the conflict". While the failure of the Luftwaffe to gain air superiority in the Battle of Britain has been championed in the general imagination as the decisive blow to Hitler's plans, many historians argue today that such plans were more a ploy for peace.

Invasion utility

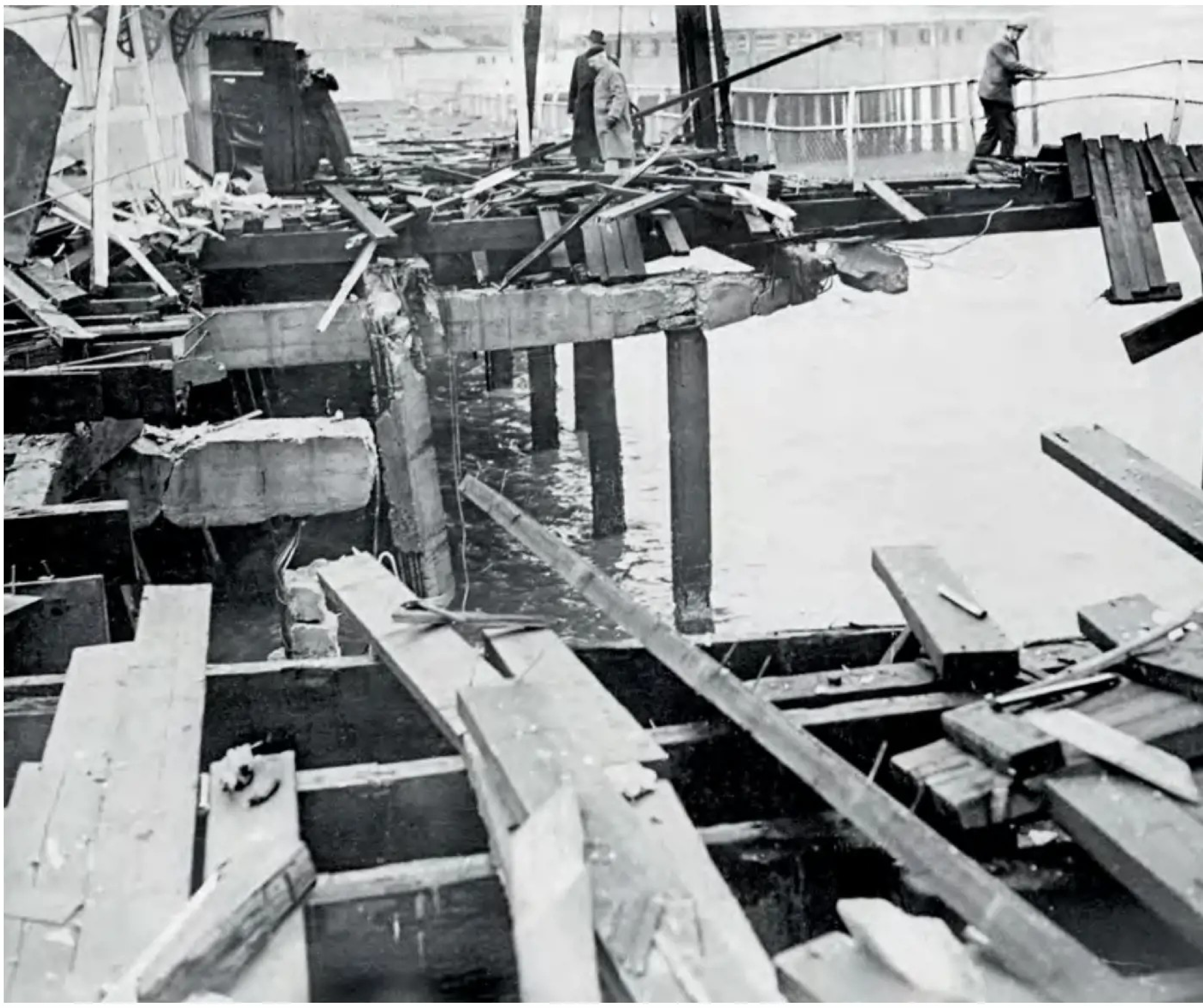
Even if Germany's invasion plans were earnest and had been carried out, it is not clear whether pleasure piers would have played a major defensive role. Although pre-war postcards and wartime reconnaissance was used to collect information about piers, they were mentioned in German plans for the invasion released under the Nazi War Crimes Disclosure Act. However, documents that *did* reveal a general attitude towards piers in wartime related to the Allies' own D-Day plans.

Nevertheless, 53 piers were requisitioned during the war. Some were lightly fortified, hosting small garrisons to strengthen general defensive posture along Britain's beaches. Armed with spot lamps and machine guns, they were important to prevent raiding or beach reconnaissance, or used to bolster anti-aircraft defences in key areas. Eastbourne's pier, for example, mounted a 40mm Bofors cannon that saw much action against 'tip and run' raiders.

It seems unlikely the British would have seriously attempted to hold seaside piers in the face of a major landing, had the Germans invaded. Piers were vulnerable, fragile and had limited capacity for resistance. That said, should they be captured intact, they would have proven useful to the Germans to rapidly disgorge troops ashore, as Southend and Margate had proved. The severing of piers was a measure applied to many, and their demolition or destruction during an unfolding invasion would have been a priority. Early on, many were wired for demolition and some were booby-trapped with mines and other devices.

The price that Britain's piers paid for preparedness was steep and greater than, in certain cases, any repairs that the post-war era of austerity could have afforded. But Britain could have afforded less to have seen them used as a bridgehead for a German invasion. Some of the piers fell catastrophically and many others never recovered. But as Churchill argued in his May 1940 address: "It is better for us to die in battle than to look upon the outrage of our nation and our altar." BW

Dr Joseph Brennan is an Australian author of historical fiction. His debut novel, Loose Lips – a World War Two sea odyssey – was a finalist for the Lambda Literary Award. His second novel – Crab Bait, a Victorian whodunit – takes Britain's seaside piers as its key site of intrigue. Find out more: josephbrennan.com



RIGHT: **On at least two occasions, German naval mines drifted into British piers, causing severe damage. This is a pier at an "East Coast town", likely Southwold pier, in 1942** TOPFOTO

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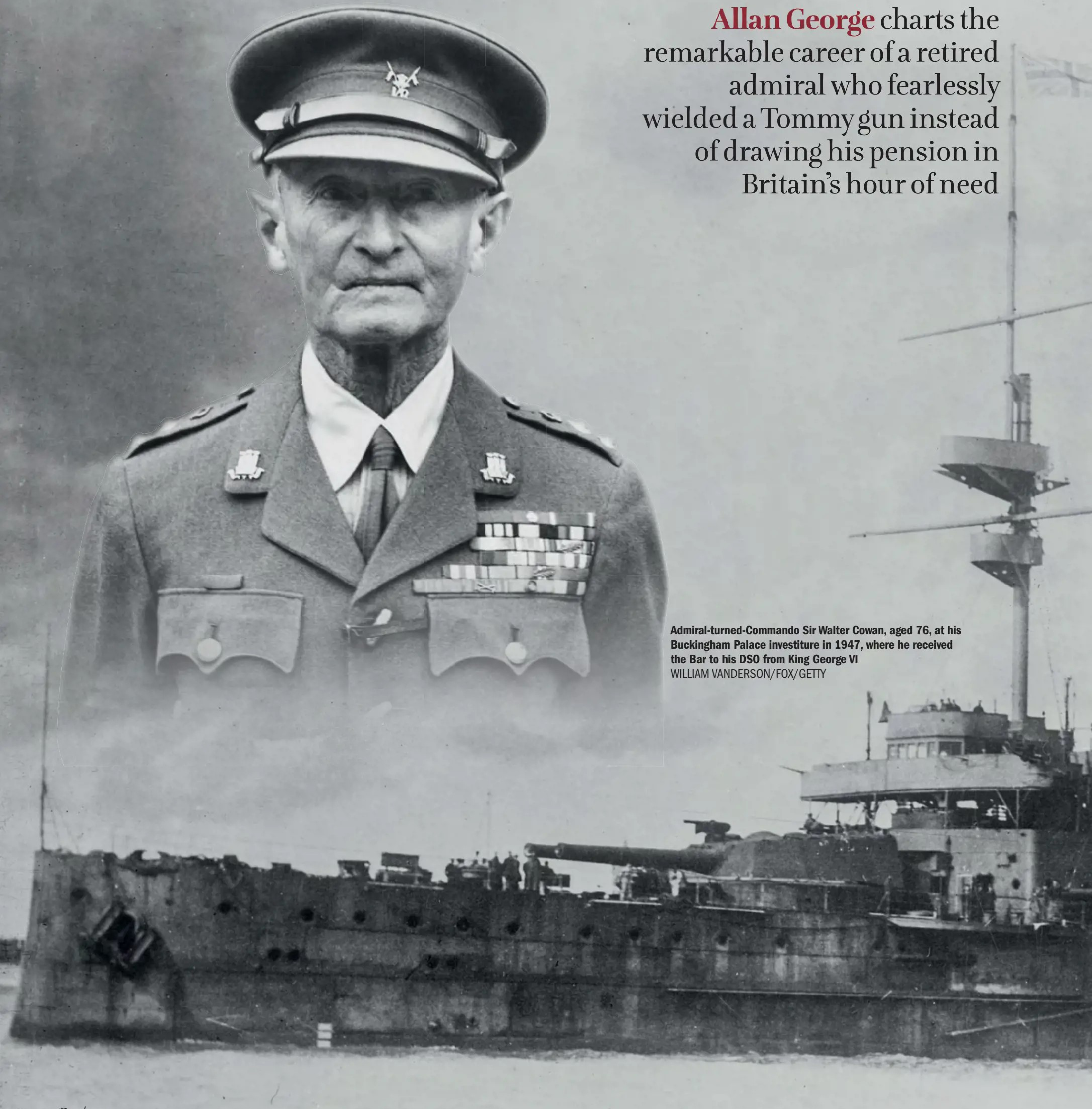
The Oldest Commando

Allan George charts the remarkable career of a retired admiral who fearlessly wielded a Tommy gun instead of drawing his pension in Britain's hour of need



Admiral-turned-Commando Sir Walter Cowan, aged 76, at his Buckingham Palace investiture in 1947, where he received the Bar to his DSO from King George VI
WILLIAM VANDERSON/FOX/GETTY

Admiral Sir Walter Cowan joined the Royal Navy in 1884 as a cadet. His varied service saw the fire-eating officer participate in no fewer than five conflicts – the Mahdist War, the Second Boer War, World War One, The Estonian War of Independence and the Russian Civil War – before retirement. He commanded destroyers, cruisers, battlecruisers and squadrons of warships – an extraordinary span of time and responsibility for one man.

However, one element of Cowan's career is even more remarkable. It reads like a Hollywood (or should that be Pinewood?) screenplay, but this Victorian naval officer – a man who learned the ropes on ships still using sails – was desperate to serve during World War Two, his sixth conflict, and only left the military as a 74-year-old commando!

The son of a Royal Welsh Fusilier officer, 'Tich' Cowan was born in Crickhowell, Wales, in 1871, but on his father's retirement from the British Army the family moved to Alveston, near Stratford-upon-Avon. Having received little formal education – and decades before his Thompson-toting commando days – Cowan joined the Royal Navy's officer training ship *Britannia* in 1884. By chance he was in the same class as David Beatty, famous as the commander of the Battlecruiser Squadron at the Battle of Jutland, and later a First Sea Lord.

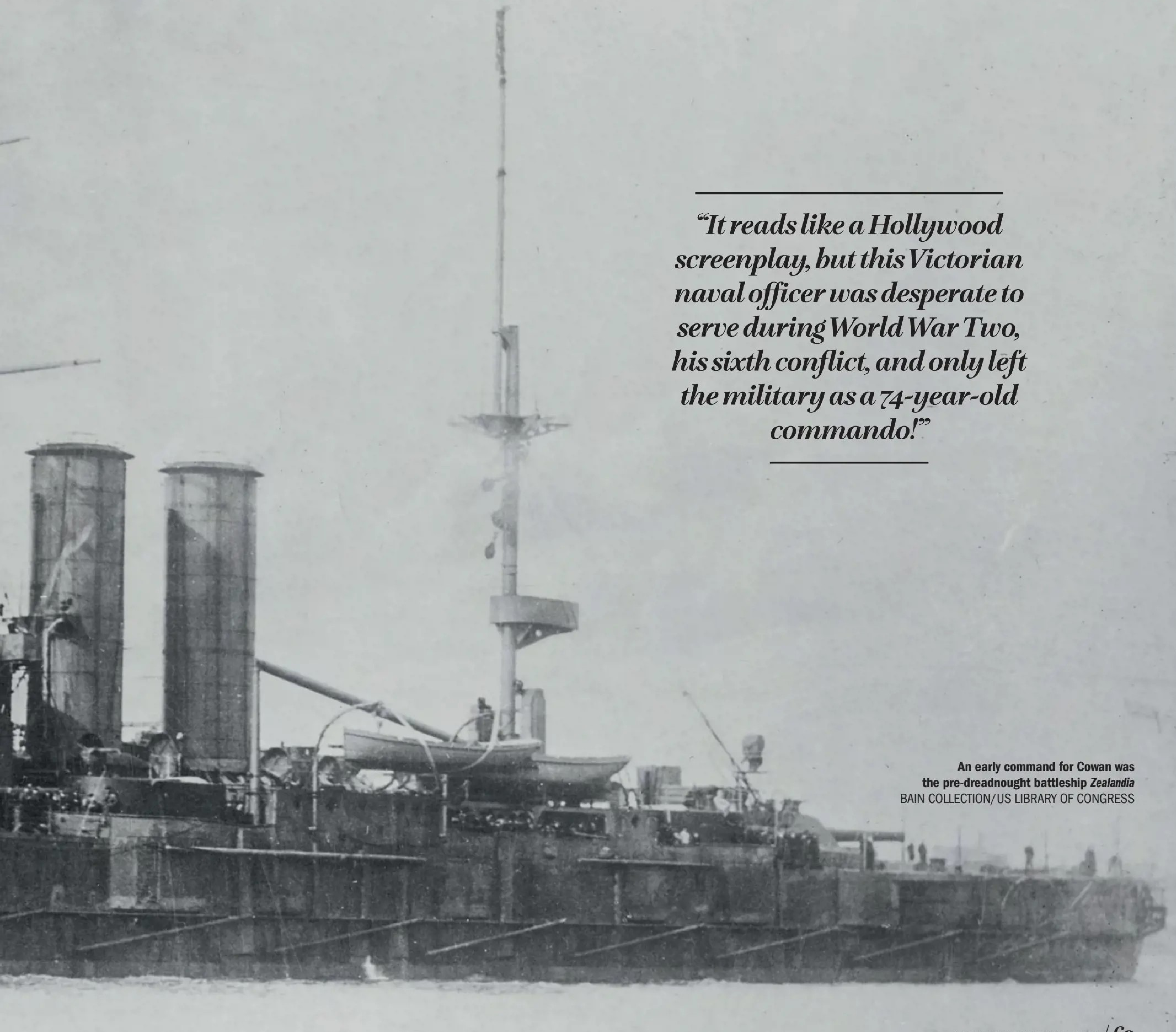
Two years later, Cowan and Beatty – now midshipmen – served together in *Alexandra*, flagship of the Mediterranean Fleet, a plum posting reserved for the most promising young officers and early recognition of future potential. Cowan's career followed the normal pattern of promotion: promoted sub lieutenant, then lieutenant, after service in the cruiser *Boadicea*, flagship of the East India Station. Greater responsibility came with appointment as first lieutenant of the gunboat *Redbreast*.

Early commands

His first command was the gunboat *Sultan*, one of the River Nile gunboat flotilla, whose task was to support land forces during the Mahdist War in Sudan. She was heavily armed for her size, with two quick-firing 12-pounders, plus a 4in howitzer and four Maxim machine guns. In her, Cowan saw action in the Battles of Atbara and Omdurman. He went on to command the entire Nile flotilla during the subsequent Fashoda Crisis, when a French expedition unsuccessfully attempted to gain control of the Upper Nile basin. Cowan received the DSO for his part in these actions.

Cowan was appointed as a naval aide-de-camp to Lord Kitchener, then subsequently to Lord Roberts, during the Second Boer

> *"It reads like a Hollywood screenplay, but this Victorian naval officer was desperate to serve during World War Two, his sixth conflict, and only left the military as a 74-year-old commando!"*



An early command for Cowan was the pre-dreadnought battleship *Zealandia*
BAIN COLLECTION/US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Cowan forged a strong and influential friendship with Admiral Sir Roger Keyes, shown here in 1918 *SEAFARERS*, 1919

German 12in shells fall between the battlecruisers *Lion* and *Princess Royal*, and British destroyers, during the Battle of Jutland
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE USN

War. On his return to England in 1901, he became first lieutenant of the battleship *Prince George*, before being promoted to commander and posted to the battleship *Resolution* in 1902.

The following year he was given command of the destroyer *Falcon* and progressed to became second-in-command of the Devonport destroyer flotilla under Roger Keyes. The two men became firm friends – a relationship that was later to pay dividends – but, for now, the two developed fleet destroyer tactics. When Keyes was appointed to a staff position in the Admiralty in 1906, Cowan succeeded him as the flotilla commander, in which position he was promoted to captain. Cowan's next posting was the cruiser *Sapphire* in 1907, and just a year later he was given command of the two destroyer flotillas of the Channel Fleet. In 1909 he took over the cruiser *Cressy*, in the Home Fleet, and in 1910 command of the new cruiser, *Gloucester*. These postings were a gradual increase in responsibility, preparation for higher command.

Just prior to the outbreak of World War One, Cowan was placed in command of *Zealandia* (ex-*New Zealand*), a pre-dreadnought commissioned in 1905 but that was now approaching obsolescence following the rapid development of capital warships under Admiral 'Jackie' Fisher's technical revolution.

Within six months, Cowan was elevated to command the fast and powerful battlecruiser *Princess Royal*, a ship that featured in his old classmate Beatty's battlecruiser force. At Jutland in 1916, the *Princess Royal* fought and was badly damaged, being hit nine times and suffering 22 sailors killed and 81 injured. She returned to Rosyth with the rest of the battlecruisers, sailing later to Devonport for permanent repairs.

Cowan remained with *Princess Royal* until June 1917, when he was appointed commodore of the 1st Light Cruiser Squadron, flying his broad pennant in *Caledon*. The Squadron fought in the Second Battle of Heligoland Bight, an inconclusive cruiser and destroyer action in November 1917. He was promoted to rear-admiral in 1918, retaining command of the squadron.

Bolstering the Baltic

Cowan's force was ordered to the Baltic in 1919, where the political situation was volatile. Following the end of the war and the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, the former Russian provinces of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania had gained their independence

Cowan was in command of the battlecruiser *Princess Royal* at the Battle of Jutland
BAIN COLLECTION/US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Cowan (right) as commander of the 1st Light Cruiser Squadron in July 1920 SMITH ARCHIVE/ALAMY

from the Russian Empire, as had the Grand Duchy of Finland. The new republic of Poland had also been created from former Russian and German lands.

However, there was considerable instability as former German Army and paramilitary units were fighting Bolshevik revolutionaries attempting putsches and uprisings. It was a fluid, violent, complex and unstable period, demanding that Cowan display diplomatic tact, while at the same time projecting power. The Royal Navy's presence in the Baltic was part of a wider British attempt to stem Bolshevik revolution spreading further through Russia and into eastern Europe. As a result, there were actions in the Far North around the White Sea and Murmansk, the Caspian and Black Seas and elsewhere, as well as the Baltic.

According to Robert Jackson, who wrote in *At War with the Bolsheviks, the Allied intervention into Russia 1917 – 1920,* Cowan's job was ill-defined: "His brief was, to say the least, vague and non-committal, and Cowan decided to interpret it in the only way possible; he would assess the situation in Estonia and Latvia, and then use his common sense in dealing with it."

The lack of definition was perhaps an advantage, giving Cowan latitude in interpretation – especially in navigating through the political and military maze he encountered. Despite the vagueness of his instructions, he gained considerable success in defanging the Bolshevik Baltic Fleet. His cruisers soon dominated the eastern Baltic and bottled up the Soviet fleet in its Kronstadt base near St Petersburg.

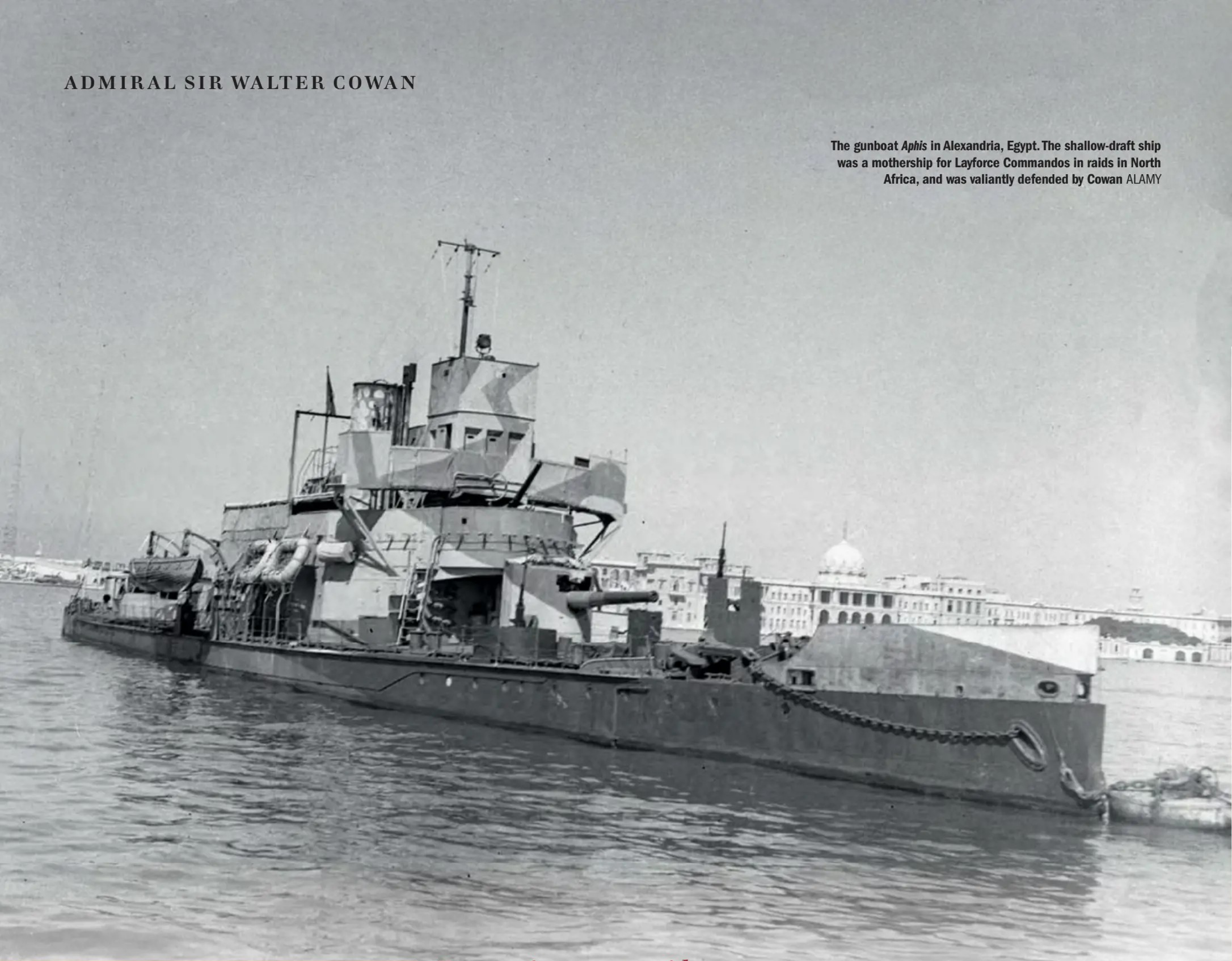
Following the sinking of the Russian cruiser *Oleg* in an attack by a coastal motorboat commanded by Lieutenant Augustus Agar (which earned him the VC), there followed an even more daring 'David and Goliath attack' on the Soviet Navy in Kronstadt. The result was two battleships and a depot ship sunk, and a third battleship damaged, leaving the Russians with just a handful of destroyers and submarines operational. Two further VCs and a chestful of other gallantry medals were awarded for the action.

Serving in Cowan's force as one of his destroyer captains was the then-Commander Andrew Cunningham, subsequently to become C-in-C Mediterranean Fleet in World War Two, victor of the Battles of Taranto and Matapan, and eventually First Sea Lord. Cowan commented on his subordinate: "Cunningham has on one occasion after another acted with unfailing promptitude and decision, and has proved himself an officer of exceptional valour and unerring resolution."

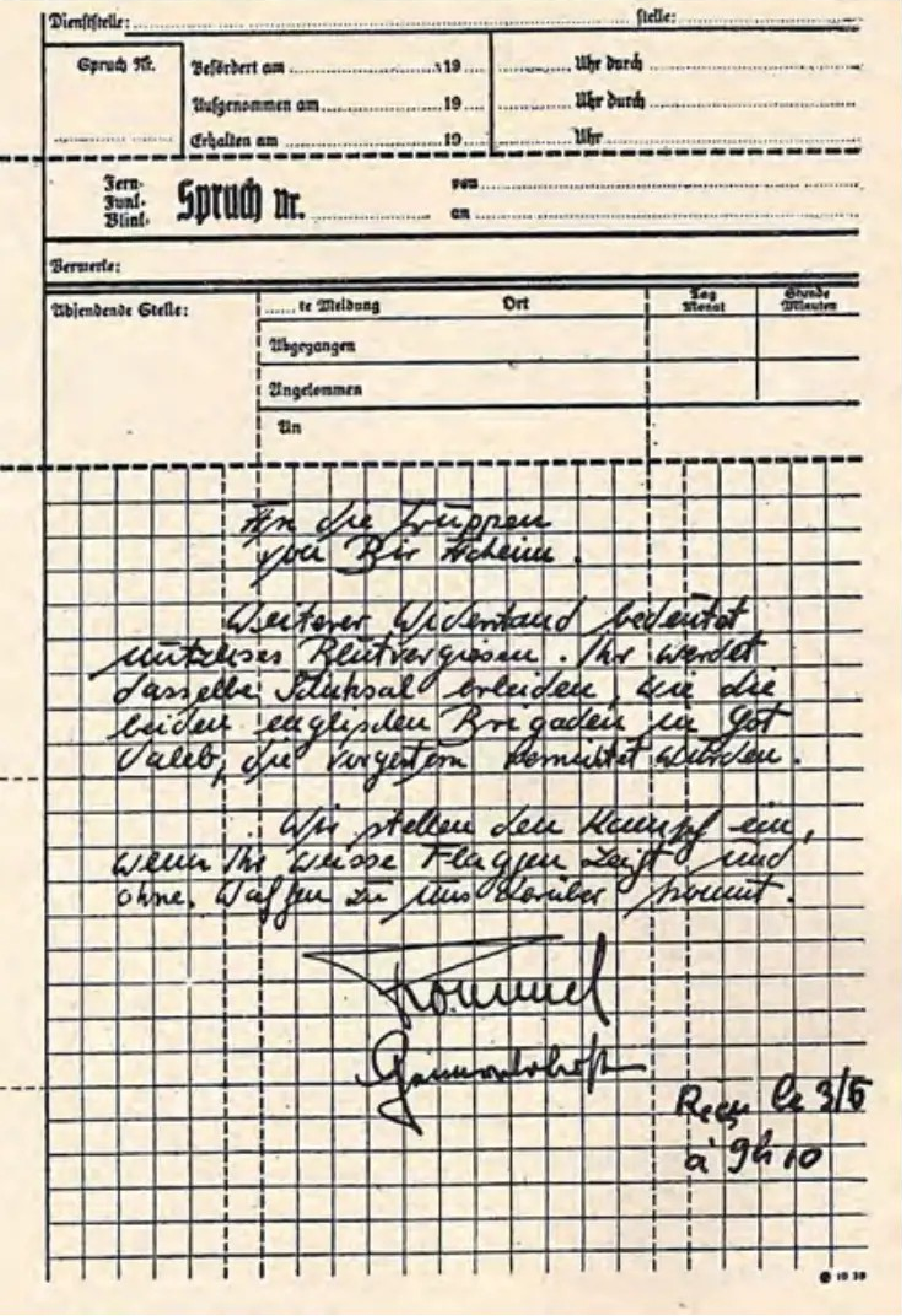
In turn, a young Cunningham was impressed by, and learned from, his senior's methods, which were to play a great part in his later successes.

Commando training demanded utmost fitness from men more than half Cowan's age and, even as an instructor, the physical demands on him would have been extraordinary. In this image, an officer appears to be armed with a Webley self-loading pistol, a rare World War One-era sidearm PASTPIX/TOPFOTO

In Scotland, Cowan honed the skills of commandos when it came to their primary insertion and extraction method; landing craft and other small vessels. He taught them to pilot the craft and to disgorge them in silence W LOCKEYEAR/IWM/GETTY



The gunboat *Aphis* in Alexandria, Egypt. The shallow-draft ship was a mothership for Layforce Commandos in raids in North Africa, and was valiantly defended by Cowan ALAMY



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An die Truppen
von Bir Hacheim.

Weiterer Widerstand bedeutet nutzloses Blutvergiessen. Ihr werdet dasselbe Schicksal erleiden, wie die beiden englischen Brigaden in Got Ualeb, die vorgestern vernichtet wurden.

Wir stellen den Kampf ein, wenn Ihr weisse Flaggen zeigt und ohne Waffen zu uns herüber kommt.

Rommel
Generaloberst

Reçu le 3/5
à 9h10

Rommel's ultimatum to the Free French at Bir Hacheim, promising an offensive, demanding their surrender, but guaranteeing safe passage into captivity. Such notions fell deafly upon Cowan's ears

From retirement to raider

Cowan relinquished command of the 1st Light Cruiser Squadron in July 1920, and the following March hoisted his flag in the battlecruiser *Hood* as the commander of the Battlecruiser Squadron. Apparently, this was not the happiest appointment, as both Cowan and Flag Captain Geoffrey Mackworth were strict disciplinarians, resulting in tensions with the lower deck sailors at a time of social upheaval and economic hardship.

During his period in command of the squadron, *Hood* cruised in the Mediterranean and in South American waters, visiting Brazil for the 100th anniversary of the country's Independence. In 1923, he left *Hood* on promotion to vice-admiral, but in common with many other senior officers was left unemployed and on half pay, a result of the reduction of the Royal Navy from its wartime strength.

His next appointment came two years later as C-in-C of the Coast of Scotland, and a year after that he became, C-in-C America and West Indies Station – a plum posting. Much of his time was taken up with flag showing cruises in the West Indies, Canada and the United States, where he met President Coolidge. Further promotion to full admiral followed in 1927, and in 1928 he hauled down his flag. Cowan's final appointment was as First and Principal Naval Aide-de-Camp to the King, a post he held until in 1931, when he retired.

Normally, that would have been the end of it. Having served already for 47 years, a staff role perhaps awaited men like Cowan should war come again. However, Cowan's active career did not end. Not being one to sit idly by, he pestered the Admiralty for work following the outbreak of World War Two in 1939. Despite him being in his late 60s, a time of life when plenty of others would be content with playing golf and tending roses – Cowan himself was keen on hunting with hounds – his petitioning paid off.

A new posting came through an old friend, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keyes. The veteran admiral, another fire-eater, was then the first director of combined operations and had, in 1918, planned and led the Zeebrugge Raid. In his role, Keyes was responsible for raising and training commando forces and planning raids on enemy-occupied coasts. Cowan voluntarily decided to accept the lower rank of commander and took on responsibility for training commandos in small boat handling from a base in Scotland. Cowan would observe as the commandos came ashore in a variety of landing craft, lifeboats and other small watercraft, chastising them if they made too much noise and forcing them to go again. Realising the commandos were struggling with boat oars, paddles from Carley floats were used instead to great effect.

Not content with a trainer role, Cowan was anxious to see action and manoeuvred to get himself sent to North Africa with Layforce, an early commando/raiding unit. He participated in seaborne raids along the Egyptian and Libyan coasts in 1942 (including a failed raid on Bardia) with No.8 (Guards) Commando. As a mothership, the unit used a former Yangtze Flotilla gunboat, *Aphis*, which repeatedly received the attentions of enemy aircraft. At one point she was attacked for seven consecutive days by Axis bombers, including the Stuka. She suffered damage to her rudder, leaving her steaming around in circles, but throughout, Cowan patrolled the deck, adding the weight of a magazine's worth of .45ACP from his Thompson to the ship's anti-aircraft defences, which included machine guns and trio of 20mm Oerlikon cannon. Of the estimated 170 bombs dropped on *Aphis*, there were no further hits, and Cowan and the ship survived to see Layforce disbanded.

> ***"Aphis was attacked for seven consecutive days by Axis bombers. She suffered damage to her rudder, leaving her steaming around in circles, but throughout, Cowan patrolled the deck, adding the weight of his Thompson to the ship's anti-aircraft defences"***

Back in the fray

Cowan attached himself to an Indian Army armoured regiment, the 18th King Edward VII's Own Cavalry. Cowan was one of 78 commandos attached to the regiment, which is said to have arrived in Tobruk after Cowan persuaded a destroyer captain to bring them in. The 18th Cavalry's war diary described Cowan as "just about the most unassuming and modest person one can meet with perfect manners which at all times are an example to us.

"He is now a permanent member of the regiment and goes everywhere with us, does everything with us and is forever proclaiming his gratitude for being allowed to be with us."

Cowan was with the unit when it took the brunt of a German attack as it fought alongside the Free French in the Battle of Bir Hacheim. Eventually, he was captured by the Italians, who must have been surprised to find an elderly

Commander Sir Walter Cowan in 1943
PASTPIX/TOPFOTO

A Free French 75mm gun crew open fire at Bir Hacheim
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE USN

Royal Navy commander fighting in the Western Desert. Reputedly, Cowan was extremely reluctant to surrender, engaging an Italian armoured car with only his sidearm. He stood tall and unflinching in the face of machine guns, later writing: "I had no feeling of dread or desire to take cover." While a POW, Cowan sent a letter to the Indian unit to explain he did run out of ammunition but did not raise his arms in surrender, as he "didn't want to disgrace the regiment".

In 1943, Cowan was repatriated in a prisoner exchange. Curiously, there was no stipulation for him to not participate in future hostile actions, as was generally the norm. Some sources suggest this was due to Cowan's advanced age – his captors simply not believing the ageing officer would return home and immediately re-join the fray. But that was exactly what Cowan did, reuniting with the commandos in Italy in 1943. He served with No.2 and No.9 Commando as a liaison officer in the Battle of Mount Ornito and in attacks on the Adriatic islands of Solta, Mljet and Brac.

The No.2 (Army) Commando war dairy notes on June 23, 1944 – the day the unit was inspected by Yugoslavian leader Marshal Tito: "At 1545hrs, notice was received that Admiral Sir Walter Cowan KCB DSO MVO was leaving for good at 1700hrs. A guard of honour of 100 men commanded by Captain Stilwell and two subalterns had been arranged for 2130hrs, his original time of departure, and this had to be got together in a hurry.

"This was mounted on the pier opposite the gunboat on which he was to embark. All available British troops turned out to wish the admiral God Speed. The partisans mounted a guard of honour at the shore end of the quay. When he had inspected them, he was piped past by each of the MGB and Vosper crews in succession. When he inspected the guard of honour he was deeply moved and made a farewell speech standing on a bollard, unfortunately the speech was cut short by emotion.

"As the MGB drew away, the remainder of 2 Commando and the others gave three magnificent cheers, while the Highland Light Infantry band played *Will ye no come back again*. It was the most stirring event most of us have ever witnessed for some time. It was with very genuine regret that the Commando saw their greatest admirer depart. The unit will be poorer for his loss."

Cowan finally and fully retired in 1945, having received the bar to his DSO more than 40 years since his first award. Post-war, he travelled to India to become the honorary colonel of the 18th King Edward's Own Cavalry, which he considered a great honour. Walter Cowan died in Leamington Spa in February 1956 aged 85. During his lengthy career he received many awards: a peerage, a knighthood, a DSO and Bar and the Estonian Cross of Liberty. Even today, his legacy is remembered by the Estonian Navy, which in 2007 named a Sandown-class minehunter after him to commemorate his service in that country's war of independence.

Admiral of the Fleet Andrew Cunningham, C-in-C of the Mediterranean Fleet during the war and First Sea Lord, paid Cowan a glowing tribute in his autobiography *A Sailor's Odyssey*: "Having known him in the Baltic and at Rosyth my feelings towards him were those of respectful admiration. But having served with him for more than two years in the much more intimate appointment of Flag Captain and Chief Staff Officer I had come to regard him also with real affection. His ideals of duty and honour were of the highest and never sparing of himself he expected others to do the same.

"We all knew of his reputation as a fighting sailor, and of his unbounded personal courage. Nothing ever daunted him. To say that he inspired us is no exaggeration." BW

Cowan, with stick, salutes as he leaves the ship that repatriated him IWM A18225

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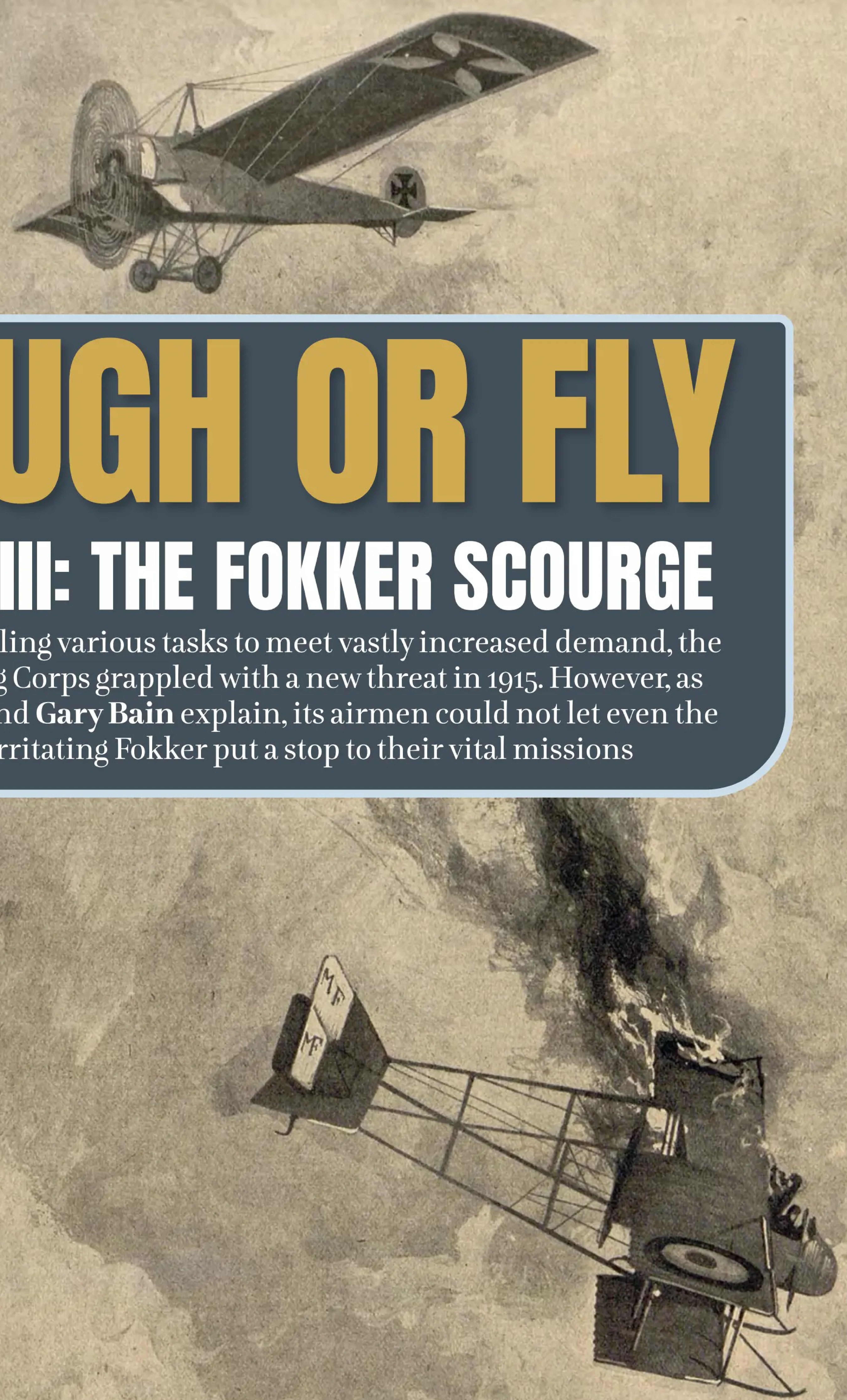
LAUGH OR FLY

PART III: THE FOKKER SCOURGE

Already fulfilling various tasks to meet vastly increased demand, the Royal Flying Corps grappled with a new threat in 1915. However, as **Peter Hart** and **Gary Bain** explain, its airmen could not let even the most irritating Fokker put a stop to their vital missions



A contemporary German artwork that ran in *Der Krieg 1914/19* depicting a victorious Fokker emerging from a dogfight with an Allied pusher fighter HANS RUDOLF SCHULZE (ARTIST)

Captain Donald Lewis of 9 Squadron developed the 'Clock Code' and controlled the fire of 9.2in Howitzers using the system. With tweaks, it later became a standard method for fire control CITY OF VANCOUVER ARCHIVES

Hard though it was, the Royal Flying Corps was blossoming under the stress of war. It still performed a strategic reconnaissance role as its aircraft penetrated German territory to monitor railway stations and military centres, watching for large-scale troop movements that might allow General Headquarters staff to discern the plans of their opposite numbers. But the development of photographic reconnaissance had a tremendous tactical value as it charted the minutiae of German defences, enabling brigade, corps and divisional commanders to understand exactly what was facing them on a day-to-day basis.

This exponential advance in the quality of intelligence went hand-in-hand with steady improvements in the capacity for effective aerial artillery observation. Wireless sets had no need for long range on the Western Front and soon the priority for a relatively light and compact set was satisfied with the Sterling spark transmitter. Squared, lettered and numbered maps were issued to both artillery and RFC army co-operation squadrons to enable gunners and aerial observers to pinpoint a target to within a few yards.

But how to improve the correction of the fall of shot? Step forward 9 Squadron's Captain Donald Lewis: "I have evolved a more elaborate system of ranging, applicable chiefly to heavy siege howitzers, where economy of ammunition is most important. I have a celluloid disc with circles inserted at 25, 100, 200, 300, 400 yards radius according to the scale of the map. Outside are painted the figures of a clock. The circles are lettered A to E. The disc is pinned with its centre on the target and its 12-6 diameter towards the battery firing. Shots are then signalled down according to their position on the map: C9, B2, etc. This will eliminate all error except that of map reading and I think it well worth trying. I intend to try it the next time I range the 9.2-inchers."

It worked. A further simplification meant the centre line was always to be towards true north and there was some tinkering with the circles, but the basic principle of the 'Clock Code' was established as early as January 1915.

A view to kill for

These notable advances made the planning of assaults and supporting bombardments much easier. The commander of First Army, General Sir Douglas Haig, was a collegiate planner and thus called in Lieutenant-Colonel Hugh Trenchard – soon to command the RFC in France – for a meeting at an early stage of the plotting for the Battle of Neuve Chapelle. Yet, despite everyone's best efforts, the Neuve Chapelle offensive, which commenced on March 10, 1915, was a failure. Although the salient around the village was pinched out as the assaulting infantry broke through, the attack then broke down in total confusion. The Germans reacted swiftly and any brief opportunities for exploitation were closed. The battle petered out after a couple more days of hard fighting.

In spring 1915, there were further developments in aviation. As the importance of aerial reconnaissance and artillery observation grew ever more obvious, so there was a great desire to destroy German aircraft carrying out the same role.

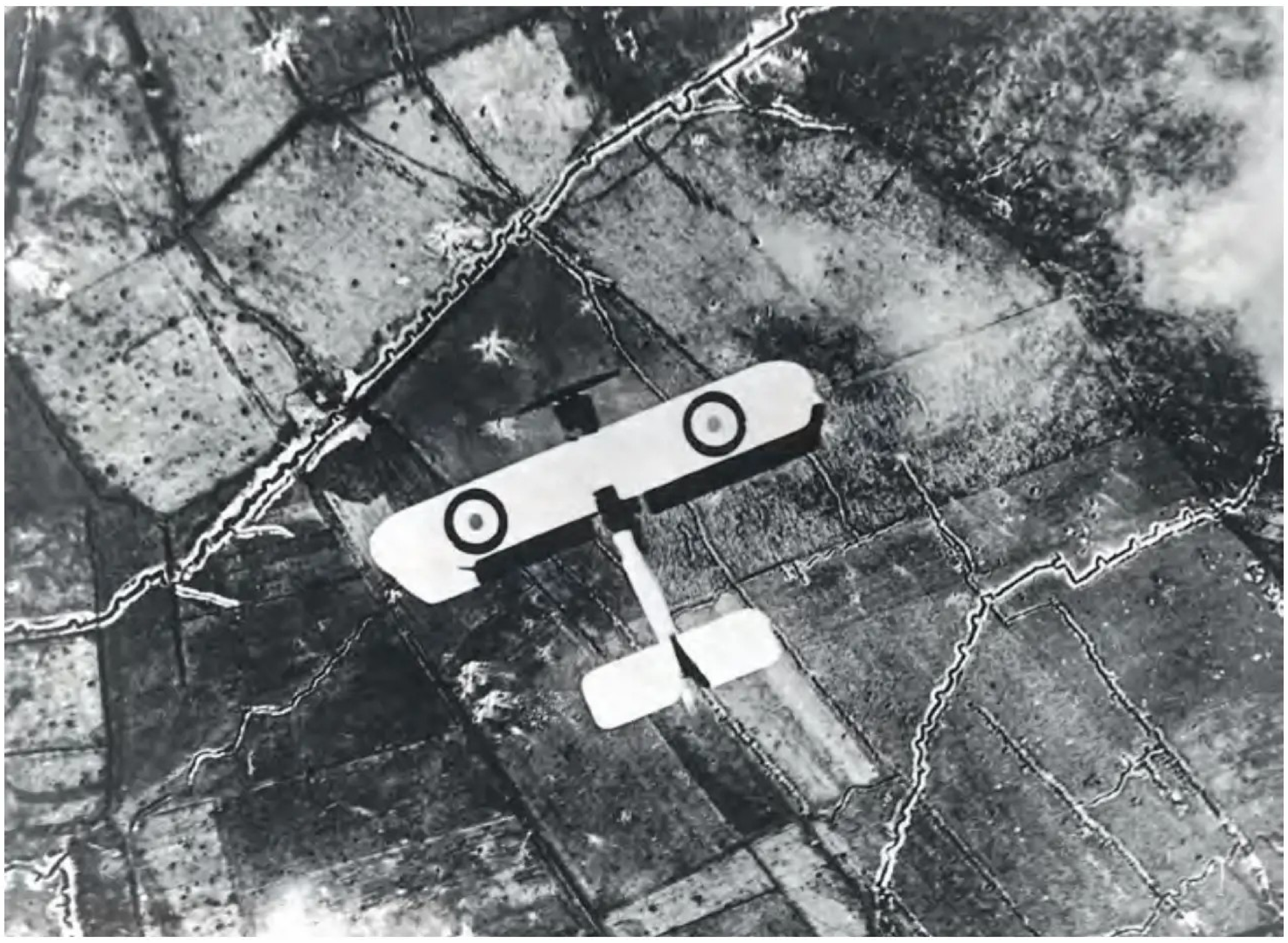
In truth, there was never an amicable relationship between opposing aviators. Both sides always sought to inflict death on their opposite numbers, but the question was how? Most aircraft were still unarmed, with crews carrying small arms. There were many wild schemes to try and secure a 'kill', such as attempts to dangle a weight on a cable with which to entangle an opponent's propeller. Unsurprisingly, this failed. Some tried to drop steel darts or small incendiary bombs onto an enemy, but no successes were reported. Another idea was to lower a bomb fitted with hooks to 'cling' to an opponent before it was remotely detonated – this never stood a chance of success.

The real answer was to mount machine guns and that awaited improvements in aircraft lifting power, but also a realisation that the weight of the Lewis gun would be considerably reduced if they removed the cooling shroud that was unnecessary in the conditions found at altitude.

As the RFC grappled with its various new tasks, there were several campaigns launched by the press and politicians back home. It was the considered opinion in some quarters that the RFC was not equipped with the 'right' aircraft and this had left them vulnerable to superior German machines. Apparently, RFC high command should 'magic up' some new types. Whatever the press might think, the real war went on in France and Flanders.

> ***"In truth, there was never an amicable relationship between opposing aviators: both sides always sought to inflict death on their opposite numbers, but the question was how?"***

Captain Lanoe Hawker of 6 Squadron, who received the VC in 1915 6 SQUADRON RECORDS



LEFT: **A BE.2C of 6 Squadron surveys the front in 1915. Observations and photographs gleaned from such sorties contributed to a strong intelligence picture as to what the Germans were doing in the battle area** 6 SQUADRON RECORDS

A 6 Squadron BE.2c used during the Battle of Neuve Chapelle 6 SQUADRON RECORDS

A German gas offensive launched the Second Battle of Ypres on April 22, 1915. As the Germans surged into the gaping holes created in the Allied lines, a new role was discovered for the RFC: the tactical contact patrol. On April 25, Captain Lanoe Hawker of 6 Squadron took off alone in his BE.2c to try and determine the limits of the German advance, but this was not something anyone was prepared for: "We still clung on to that part of St Julien southeast of the stream, which seemed to be forming our line of resistance at the moment. From here the line went northeast again and I had a very careful look at that bit of ground, circling and going over it again and again till I could make sure of the exact positions we held.

"It was while flying low over a big farm to the north of this bit that I received a bullet just above my left ankle, which solved the problem as to who held the farm! It was remarkably painful and I headed for home. But as I could use my foot, I turned back to deny the Germans the satisfaction of having driven me off, placed the farm carefully on the map and *then* went home."

The RFC also attempted interdiction bombing, trying to prevent German reinforcements arriving by cutting rail links and bombing stations, bridges and sidings. With just a few aircraft available, each only capable of carrying small bombs and further hampered by the lack of an effective bombsight, they were unlikely to cause damage, even without the close attention of anti-aircraft defences concentrated around such vital logistical centres. Bombing was not yet an effective weapon.

First fighters

The French were still doing nearly all the heavy lifting on the Western Front. However, the British were required to launch spoiling attacks to try and support the gigantic French offensive raging like fury in the Vimy Ridge-Artois area. The first of these was the Battle of Aubers Ridge, which began on May 9, 1915. The RFC performed valuable work, but there was a continued problem in attempts to carry out contact patrols, designed to see what was happening and report back to headquarters to allow the appropriate tactical interventions.

Contact patrols remained a problem throughout the war, pilots and observers still stymied by their inability to see what was really happening on the ground – or,

BELOW: **The Lewis gun became a common air-to-air weapon and was often mounted on Foster mounts or Scarff rings. The distinctive cooling shroud has been removed from this gun and replaced by a thinner jacket to protect the barrel and gas tube** DAVID MCLELLAN/OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH

ABOVE: **Commander of the Royal Flying Corps in France, Hugh Trenchard (shown in 1929 as Marshal of the RAF) worked closely with army officers and understood that his airmen had to sustain the support of ground forces at all costs** HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY

VOICES FROM THE SKY

The Sterling spark transmitter revolutionised aerial communications. Also known as the No.1 Aircraft Transmitter Spark, this was the first purpose-built airborne wireless used by the RFC and was introduced in 1915. Approximately 1,300 were built, the first by Sterling Telephone & Electric Co Ltd of Tottenham Court Road, London, before production was handed over to War Department factories.

The set was based on a design by Lieutenant Basil Binyon of the Royal Naval Air Service, with advice from Captain H Lefroy of the Royal Engineers, both pioneers in wireless communications. The Sterling operated on the frequency range of 100-260 metres and had an output of 30-40 watts, this, paired with a 120ft copper aerial trailing the aircraft, gave a communications range of up to ten miles.

The wireless was usually mounted on the side of an aircraft's fuselage, while the aerial wire weighed just 3lb and was spooled out alongside the wireless or through an insulated gland in the floor. It was designed for one-way communication to relevant ground parties, such as a gun battery or ship, using Morse code. The transmitter and Morse key were enclosed to avoid a spark igniting petrol vapours. Later, two-way functionality was added.

While decisive, the Sterling set gave way to new designs and new practices in a rapidly developing field. In 1914, RFC/RNAS airmen had to land at a base or near a friendly unit to deliver their information in person, by car or by ground communications. In 1918, some RAF aircraft were flying with two-way voice communications with pilots using headphones and throat microphones.

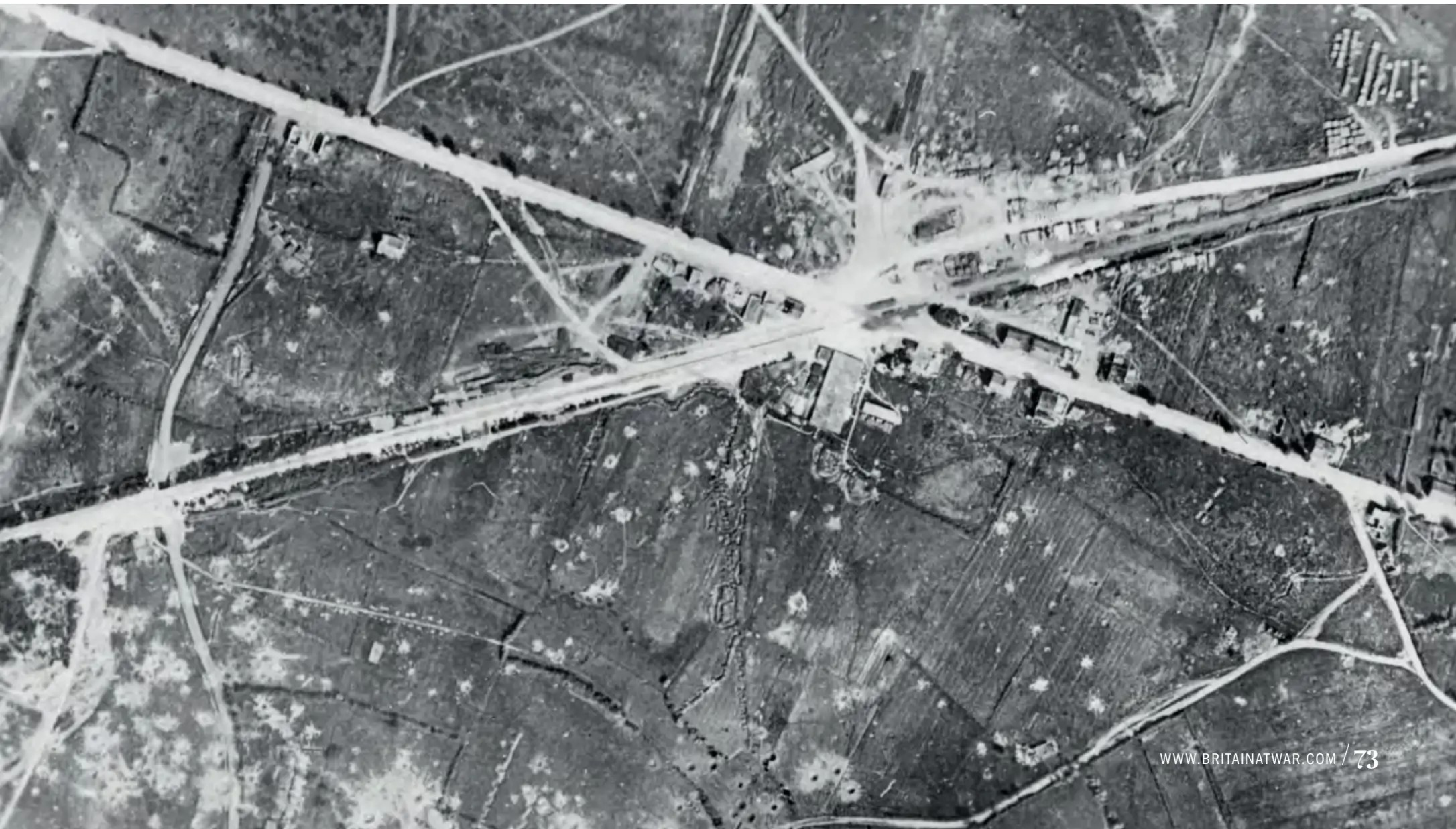
> *"At first the potential of the Fokker was rather lost as it was originally used to escort other aircraft. It was not yet the scourge it would become. Like every new weapon of war, it had to be assessed and have the best tactics devised"*

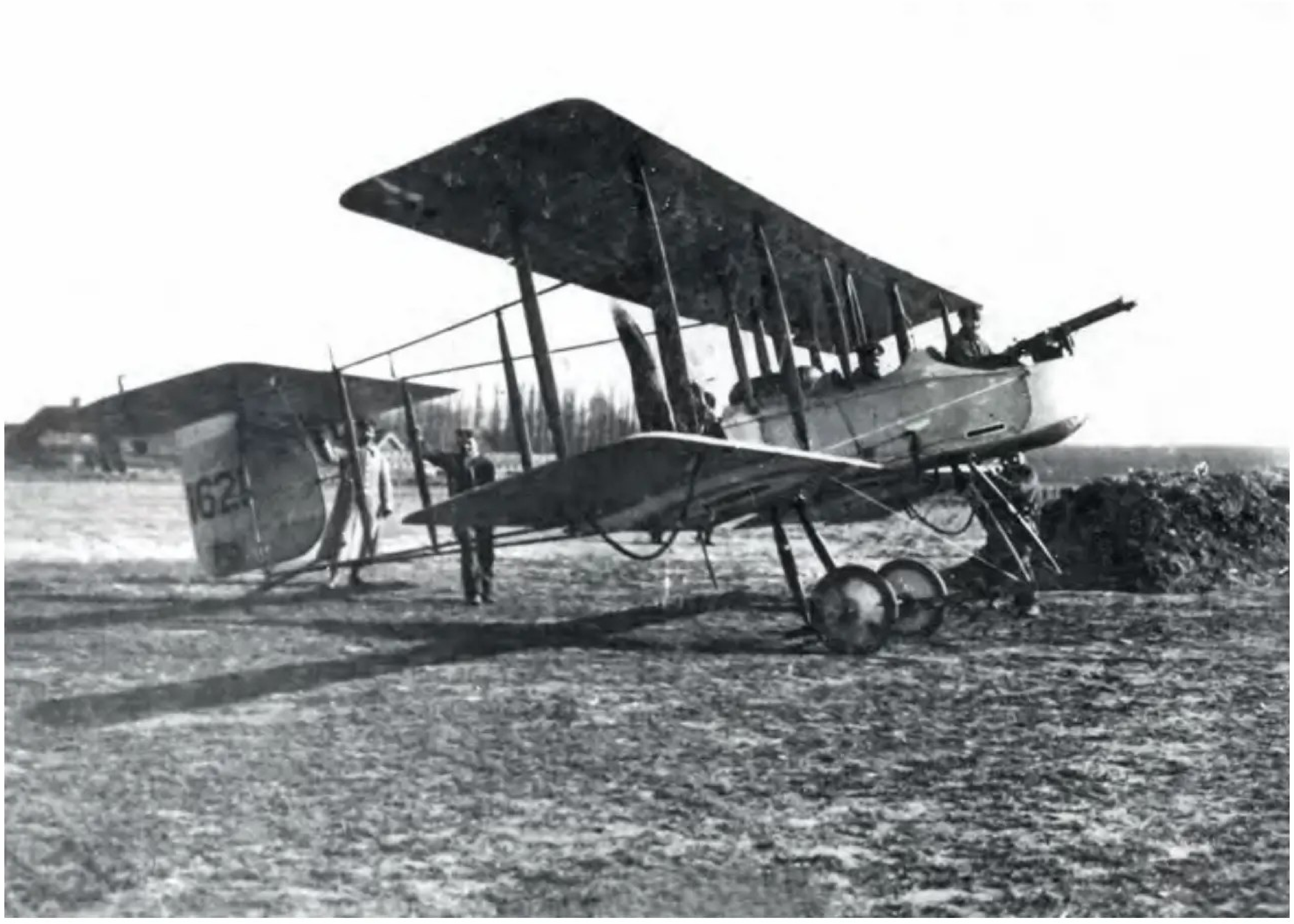
indeed, to get messages back to the right place at the right time.

This failure would be repeated in the equally disastrous Battle of Festubert, launched on May 15, as glumly recorded by 16 Squadron's Lieutenant Archibald James: "I was sent out to observe the progress of the battle, so far as I could from 5,000ft. It had been arranged that, to let those in the air see how far they'd got, the most advanced troops would from time to time put out white strips of cloth about 8ft long and 1ft wide. To my astonishment when I arrived at almost first light the whole of the battlefront was covered with white strips – what had happened was that the Germans had lined their trenches with wooden boards. When our bombardment hit a trench, it blew out a number of planks which scattered and were quite indistinguishable from the white strips."

In summer 1915, Brigadier-General Sir David Henderson was posted back to the War Office and, in his place, Hugh Trenchard was promoted to brigadier in command of the RFC on the Western

BELOW: **A reconnaissance photograph of Zonnebeke prior to an artillery bombardment. With its road junction and stored supplies (top right), it is easy to see why the village made a tempting target** VIA ANDREW THOMAS





ABOVE: **Vickers FB.5 Gunbus, No.1621, of 16 Squadron in February 1915. Britain's first fighter was already lacking by the middle of the year, and this particular example was brought down by anti-aircraft fire near Courtrai, with Second Lieutenant Montagu Chidson and Dennis Sanders captured** 16 SQUADRON RECORDS

Front. This was the man that would guide the RFC through most of the rest of the war. His assistant was Captain Maurice Baring. It seemed an unnatural partnership – the bluff, inarticulate Scot and the cultured, amusing literary gentleman – but it worked perfectly. Trenchard had also formed a close working relationship with Haig, invaluable for both men. However, Trenchard was often incapable of expressing himself clearly. The following comment illustrates that perhaps it was as well the brigadier-general did not try too often: "I'm not asking you to do anything I wouldn't do myself. Just because I'm condemned to ride about in a big Rolls-Royce and sit out the fighting in a chair, you mustn't think I don't understand."

ABOVE: **Hauptmann Oswald Boelcke is considered by many to be a father of air combat, and the 40-kill ace made his presence felt above the Western Front** SAN DIEGO AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM

New squadrons and aircraft were continuing to arrive. On July 25, 1915, 11 Squadron, the first proper scout squadron arrived, entirely equipped with Vickers fighters. The FB.5 Gunbus may well have been the first true purpose-built aircraft for aerial combat, but it was already approaching obsolescence thanks to its slow speed and limited armament. This was a process accelerated by the near-simultaneous arrival of the first examples of the Fokker E.I monoplane, Germany's first dedicated fighter. As an aircraft, the Fokker was not particularly impressive, but it had a machine gun with an interrupter gear to enable it to fire through the propeller. At first, the potential of the Fokker was rather lost as it was originally used to escort other aircraft. The Fokker was not yet the scourge it would become. Like every new weapon of war, it had to be assessed and have the best tactics devised to maximise its potential.

Agile enemies

New to the front was 12 Squadron, equipped with the BE.2c. One of its observers, Second Lieutenant Raymond Money, gave an excellent account that encapsulates the spirit of a squadron getting readying for war in September 1915: "Every stone in weight made a difference, and whether we should carry a Lewis gun or not (and, if so, how few drums of ammunition) was considered on every occasion. Heavy observers were anathema, and I remember seeing Lees send Windsor back one day to take off his heavy flying clothing. This was sheer bullying, of course; but people got a lot of fun out of Windsor, who was one of the most engaging, amusing buffoons I've ever met."

After a series of familiarisation flights, the squadron's first reconnaissance missions began. Here, Money was introduced to the pleasure of 'Archie' – anti-aircraft fire: "I did a recce to Valenciennes with Lees. It was an unpleasant trip. Archie smothered us, and as we couldn't get higher than 4,000ft for some reason, even the field guns had a go at us. The war seemed to have ceased in every direction except ours, and it seemed grossly unfair because we couldn't hit back. I felt like a huge pheasant flying frightfully slowly over all the game shots in the country."

The RFC was governed by the necessity of supporting the operations of the BEF in every possible way. That was its function. In turn, the BEF under Sir John French was harnessed to the overall plans of the French, the dominant partner on the Western Front. General Joseph Joffre was planning a gargantuan offensive on the Artois and Champagne fronts, while the British were required to attack at Loos. This was a small part of a bigger plan, but

An agile monoplane with a forward-firing machine gun and interrupter gear, the Fokker Eindecker was a capable early fighter VIA ANDREW THOMAS

ABOVE: **Oberleutnant Max Immelmann was another pioneering German ace and briefly shared the use of a Fokker Eindecker with Oswald Boelcke** ARCHIVE PHOTOGRAPH

> *"I yanked the gun out, leaned over the right side of the cockpit and, holding the Lewis like a rifle, let go with a burst. Before I had let off 20 rounds, the gun slipped out of my gloved hands. I shall never forget the look of horrified surprise on my pilot's face"*
>
> AIR MECHANIC IRA JONES, 10 SQUADRON, RFC

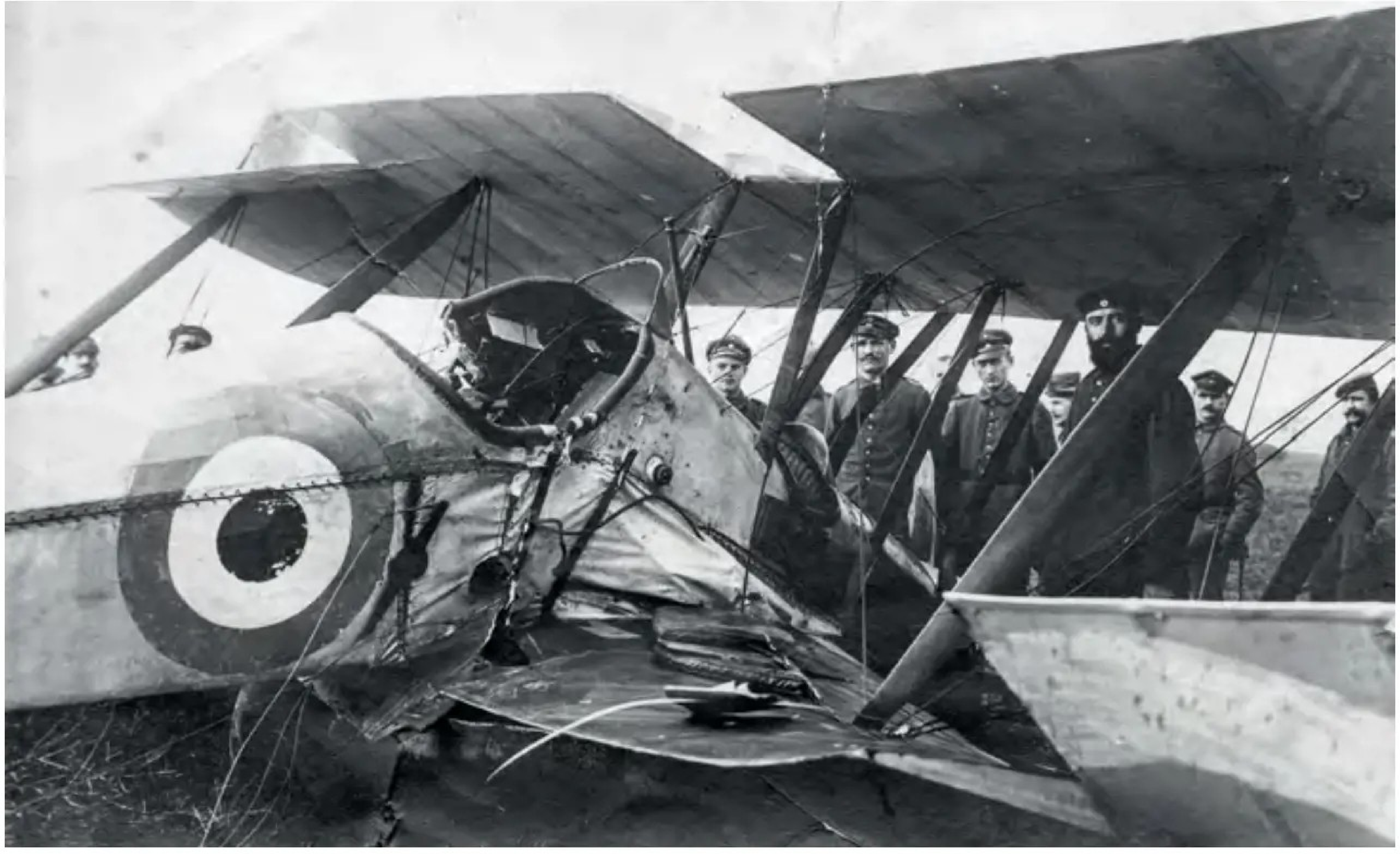
was still the 'Big Push' as far as the BEF was concerned. As was becoming routine, the Loos area was photographed and prospective targets identified. The RFC performed well during the battle, which commenced on September 25, 1915, but some of its functions were hampered by poor visibility, rendering useless any efforts to monitor progress by contact patrols. As the battle raged, fog and rain hampered the aviators' efforts. Soon it was apparent the offensive had failed on both the British and French fronts.

October 1915 saw the real advent of the much vaunted 'Fokker scourge' as the Fokker E.I was augmented by the E.II and E.III. They were still not overly numerous, but the Germans were blessed with a few influential pilots who would develop a whole new language of aerial warfare, perfecting the role of the scout.

Max Immelmann and Oswald Boelcke were the best known, both aces who unleashed the Fokker scourge: diving down out of the sun or clouds to secure surprise and attacking from behind to get a quick victory before their opponents could react. Boelcke was at the forefront of developing the first formation attacks, with one Fokker acting as 'point', engaging an enemy, while two more protected his tail. Meanwhile, the 'Immelmann Turn' enabled a Fokker pilot to go into a half loop, before rolling out (while inverted) to leave him still able to fire at his victim, having gained a small height advantage.

The shortcomings of the BE.2c became even more apparent and airmen threw everything but the kitchen sink at the problem – quite literally in the case of 10 Squadron Air Mechanic Ira Jones, who perfectly exemplified the difficulties of trying to fight an agile opponent with seemingly everything against them: "There were four mountings on the BE, intended

BELOW: **This 2 Squadron BE.2c, No 1734, fell victim to a pair of Fokkers near Lens** VIA ANDREW THOMAS



SHIPS OF THESEUS

While admiring the deeds of the men in the air, we must not forget the hard graft of groundcrews. As the demands grew on the RFC, more strain was put on the limited number of aircraft, which, after all, were hardly the sturdiest of machines.

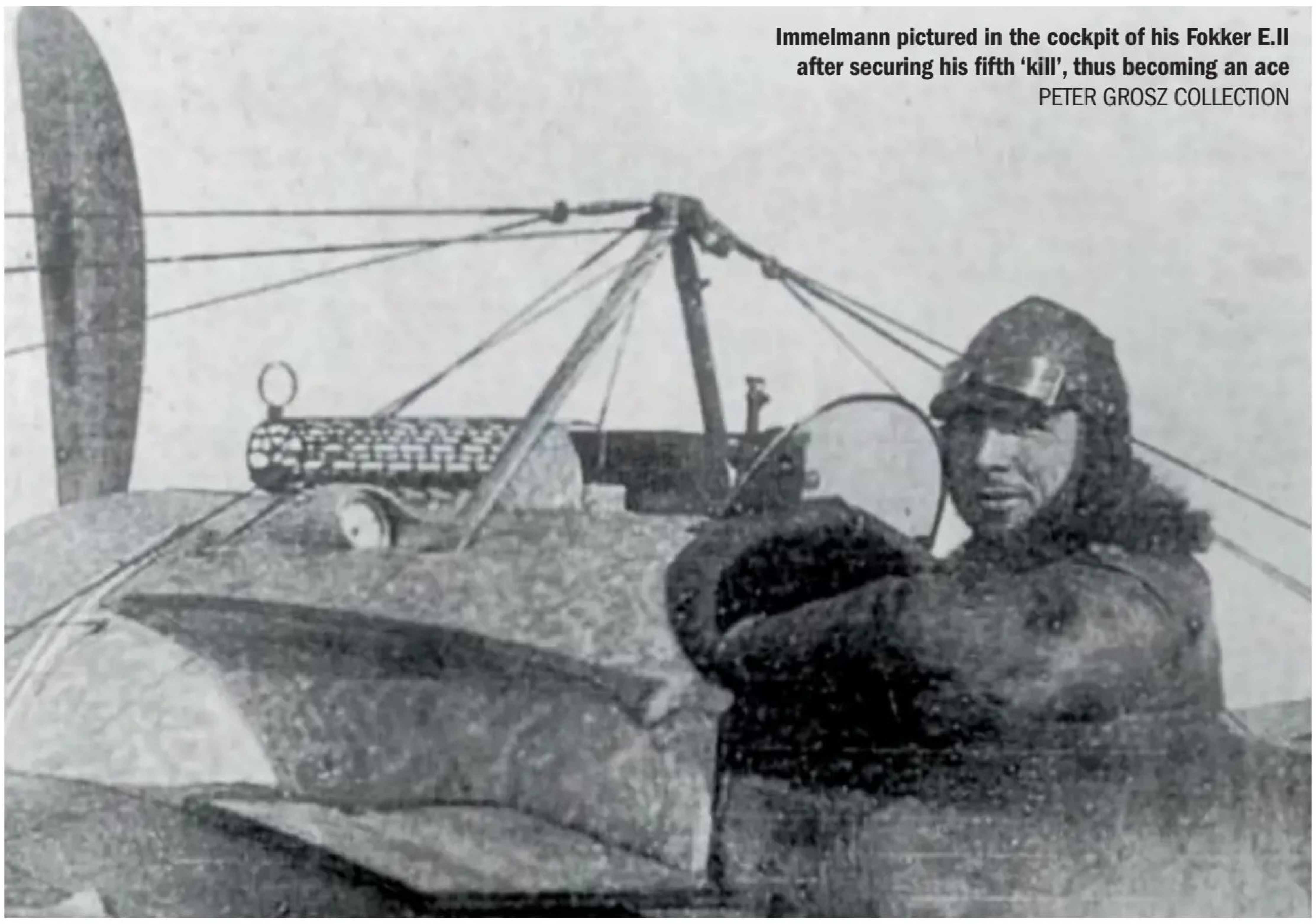
As 1 Squadron Air Mechanic Samuel Saunders described, he and his comrades moved mechanical mountains to keep aircraft in service and pilots flying: "My main job was engine-fitter, to look after the engine, see that the fuel and everything was in working order and properly adjusted. When I thought an engine was sufficiently long-running, I'd say to the pilot: 'I'll change this engine when you come down.' We took this engine out and we put it at the back of the hangar, retrieved one from there and put it in the aircraft

"As soon as that was installed properly and tried, then we all got together, any engine-fitters – sometimes a rigger if they weren't busy – and we'd pull the old engine to pieces, check it up, examine it, and any part that we thought wanted renewing, we'd renew it. The same aircraft might have four or five different engines in it during its lifetime. Then the fabric might be badly patched or badly damaged with the oil and petrol, perhaps that had been re-covered three or four times. Then a longeron might have been shot away, that would have been replaced.

"You couldn't really say how long an aircraft lasted, but we still painted the same number on the aircraft after we'd done a big job on it! Very often we had an aircraft which was officially credited with about a 120 hours' flying time, but the only thing that had actually done that 120 hours would be the number on the rudder – and even that had been renewed several times."

To the more modern mind this has much in common with Trigger's broom, unchanging except for several new brush heads and a few new handles. Nevertheless, the skilled contribution of groundcrews was essential to keeping British squadrons in the fight.

RFC groundcrew were vital to sustaining sortie rates and could perform engineering miracles to keep aircraft flying. However, this Avro 504 was likely beyond economical repair! DENT FAMILY/PROVINCIAL ARCHIVES OF ALBERTA



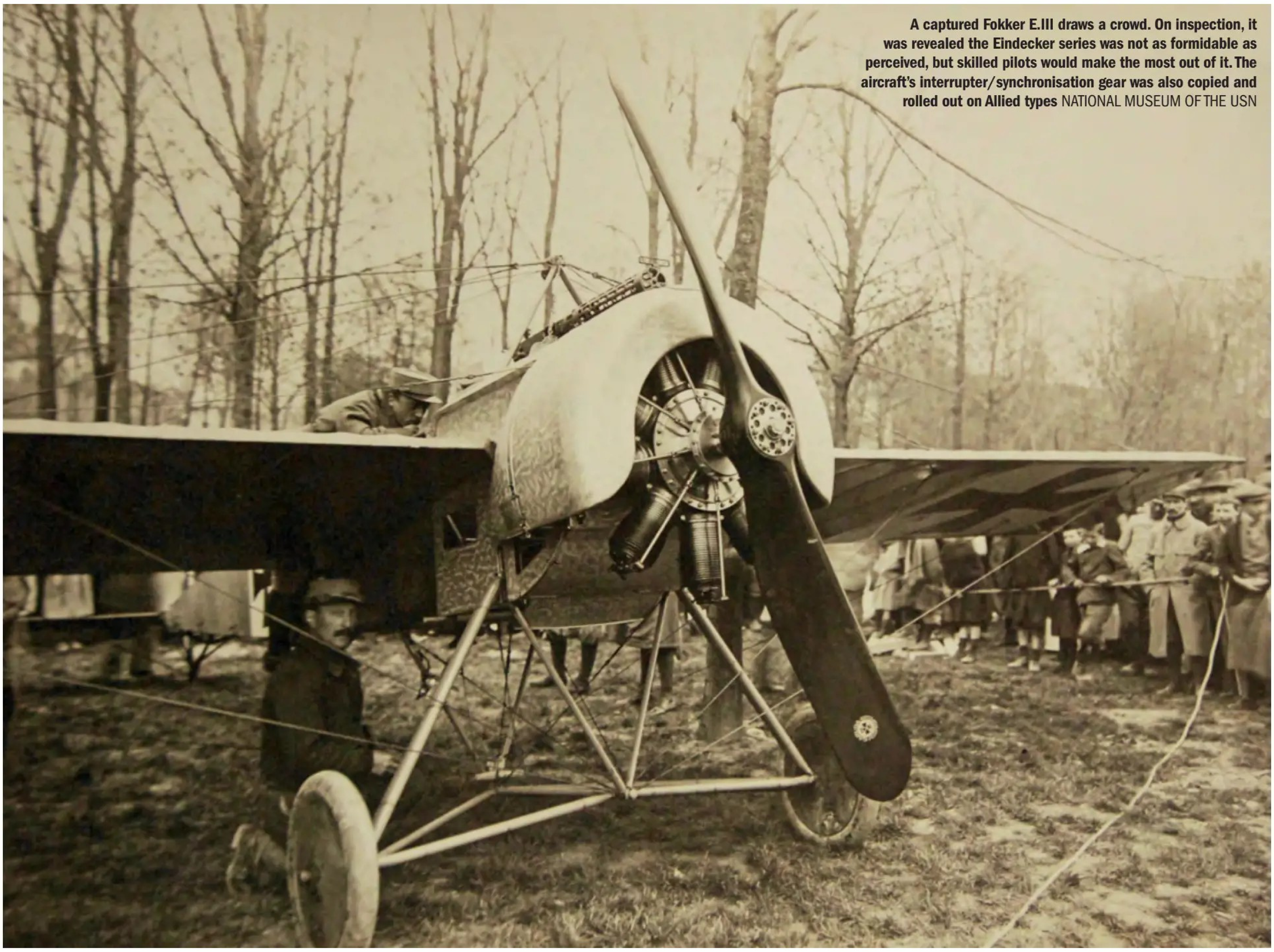
Immelmann pictured in the cockpit of his Fokker E.II after securing his fifth ‘kill’, thus becoming an ace PETER GROSZ COLLECTION

to cover a wide field of fire. To get a shot at the enemy, the observer had to keep changing the Lewis gun from one socket to another. If an enemy got under your belly, none of the sockets was any good. You couldn’t get at him.

“Seeing this blighter – and being unable to do anything about it – was more than I could stand. I yanked the gun out, leaned over the right side of the cockpit and, holding the Lewis like a rifle, let go with a burst. I had reckoned, however, without the recoil of the gun and the effect of the slipstream on an insecurely held weapon. Before I had let off 20 rounds, the gun slipped out of my gloved hands. I shall never forget the look of horrified surprise on my pilot’s face when he saw our only gun sailing past the Fokker. To say I felt naked is understating the fact. The Hun must have seen the gun whizz past. I shall never know whether he was a rare sportsmen or stunned by surprise, but, to our astonishment, he broke off the action.”

The killing business

One aerial duel became quite celebrated. Captain Robert Loraine had been posted in as a flight commander to 5 Squadron in September 1915. On October 26, he and his observer, Lieutenant Eric Lubbock, were flying in their Gunbus when they sighted a German about four miles away: “I had asked Lubbock to hold his fire till I gave him the order, for I meant to engage at the closest possible quarters. As we drew, approaching each other nose-to-nose, I pretended to outclimb him. He opened fire at about 400 yards, and I stood my machine nearly on its tail to mislead him into thinking I was trying to gain the uppermost position and lure him on.”



A captured Fokker E.III draws a crowd. On inspection, it was revealed the Eindecker series was not as formidable as perceived, but skilled pilots would make the most out of it. The aircraft’s interrupter/synchronisation gear was also copied and rolled out on Allied types NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE USN

At last, with the Gunbus in position, Lubbock took up the story: "We both opened fire at about 50 yards. I fired again at 25 yards, firing 26 rounds, and then my gun jammed. I heard Loraine give a great shout but felt neither fear nor triumph. Then our machine turned downwards. As I fired my last shot, I had seen the German turn down. I knew that if he got below us my machine gun was the only one that could fire at him, so I worked away trying to unjam it. We were diving, I was standing almost on the front of the body.

Loraine seems to have handled his machine well: "I quickly dived, passing just below him with about 5ft between my upper plane and his wheels, firing from both guns – continuous fire with the enemy pilot as target. I had passed under him; I turned and found him diving steeply. I dived after him, re-opening fire from both guns, which jammed. At one moment my dive became so vertical that Lubbock, who had released himself from the strap that bound him to the seat so as to have freer movement to work his gun, was almost thrown out. I continued to dive, hoping to fire, when I saw the enemy crash behind our lines. By this time, I was about 60ft above the ground and had to redress the machine from the dive into horizontal flight – an operation which is not without considerable danger, as the strain thrown on the wings is very severe."

The mad dive brought them under fire from machine guns on the ground. It had been a close-run thing, for in the freezing cold their Lewis guns had failed them. Then a new German aircraft appeared at about 9,000ft. Having wrenched the fighter out of the dive, Loraine did not hesitate and climbed to engage this new adversary. Lubbock realised he had to get the Lewis guns working again: "I finally got both guns working. We saw another enemy coming in the distance, and Loraine went all out to climb and attack, while I put my stiff and aching hands in my mouth, praying for sufficient life to come back to them – they were frozen. Then our engine stopped and we were helpless, so we turned and glided homewards. We landed in a ploughed field – a beautiful landing."

The strain of the near-vertical dive, followed by the sudden climb, had been too much for the engine. Loraine and Lubbock visited the German aircraft they had shot down. The men had very different reactions to the scene, as Loraine recalled: "I was elated at the result, and somewhat shocked to find Lubbock in tears. 'Just think of his mother,' he said. 'I hate this killing business!' 'Think of your mother,' I said. 'You can't win wars by weeping over the enemy's dead!'"

As 1915 drew to a close, despite concern within the RFC and a frenzied clamour back home, the Fokker Scourge was never a really serious threat to the vital work of the RFC. The number of casualties did increase, but so too did the amount and variety of the work successfully carried out, with the number of sorties flown rising and the number of flying hours increasing exponentially to match the growing number of RFC squadrons deployed. The Fokkers were deadly, but there were only around 40 in service by December 1915.

Trenchard knew that whatever casualties the RFC suffered would be nothing compared to the numbers at risk on the ground and did not hesitate to press his men forward. However, until a British scout that could match the Fokker arrived, they would have to fly in close formations of three or four machines, to concentrate the fire of their machine guns on any attacker. This meant a slight reduction in the missions flown, as it would take three aircraft to achieve what one might have done, but the point was that the work was still being undertaken. The RFC continued undaunted, whatever the odds. BW

RFC airmen stand ahead of their unit's BE.2b. RFC units would have to adapt their tactics and formations to fend off more agile enemies until comparable British scouts/fighters became available in 1916 PROVINCIAL ARCHIVES OF ALBERTA

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Pride and Fall

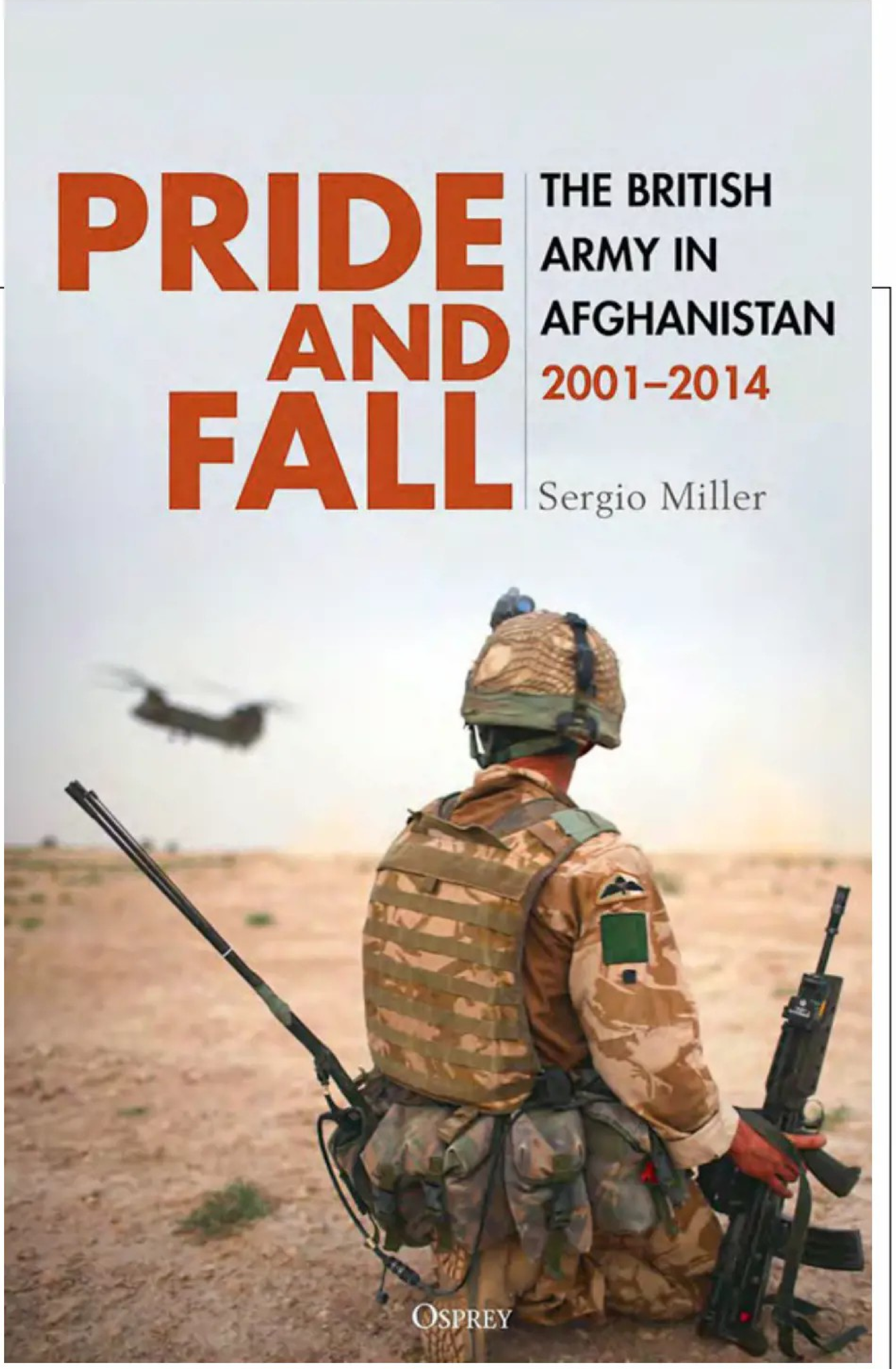
The British Army in Afghanistan, 2001-2014

By Sergio Miller

Every history book that I have read about the British Army's campaign in Afghanistan begins in the same way: general consternation as each writer struggles to begin so bleak a narrative. Sergio Miller is just the latest author to attempt a one-volume history. Unfortunately, no matter how many times they rewrite the story of the British campaign, the start, the middle and the end are always the same – and it is not an easy tale to read, as *Pride and Fall* neatly demonstrates.

Miller, a former British Army Intelligence Corps officer who was working at Whitehall during the conflict in Afghanistan, I am pleased to say has written in my opinion the best history so far. The first strength of *Pride and Fall* is how easily Miller demonstrates that this is not hindsight speaking. It was established at the outset that Britain's armed forces were in no fit state to fight in Afghanistan in 2001, let alone switch theatres to open a two-front war in the Middle East as Iraq was invaded in 2003. Intervention in Afghanistan, Miller concludes, was next to impossible because the larder was empty. The US forces who were leading the operation in 2001 were offered their pick from the entire British military establishment and they chose a handful of refuelling aeroplanes from the RAF, a few operators from the special forces and a brace of cruise missiles mounted in a Royal Navy hunter-killer submarine. That was it – and the sub had to withdraw to rearm after the first day.

Miller charts the dreadful steps from that minor opening role, to how an entire British brigade was dispatched to Helmand Province as the situation in the country continued to decline. Make no mistake, it's a convoluted and depressing tale but Miller provides understanding and clarity. Taking pains to explain why a brigade was too large a force to field and sustain from the depleted ranks of the British Army and yet too small to operate efficiently across all of Helmand Province. In a fascinating passage, Miller recounts the sorry tale of Now Zad: In May 2006, British troops arrived in the rural backwater and no one took any notice. However, on a patrol in June, shots rang out and a gunfight developed. Now Zad was never peaceful again; the more you shoot, the more you get shot at seems to be the lesson. The skill, bravery and courage of the troops notwithstanding, it is the folly of the platoon house strategy that leaves the worst impression. By these self-imposed Rorke's Drifts, British troops were stuck in one place. Giving locals a focus to aim for, all land routes leading to them were heavily mined with IEDs; exacerbating the shortage of supply helicopters because no other method could deliver supplies. Any attempt to move supplies along the roads and tracks required an enormous number of armoured vehicles and lorries ushered in by ground troops beneath an umbrella of Apaches and fast jets. It was the tail wagging the dog.



A complaint that I usually have with histories of the British Army is the inability of authors to include soldiers who are not blokes and any mention of civilians. Miller, perhaps because of extensive experience, does not have this problem. All soldiers are given space in these pages, as are their loved ones at home who suffered the privations of a soldier going on tour.

What was new to me was Miller's examination of British intelligence-gathering in Helmand Province and how it improved. If you watched the two documentaries made by actor and presenter Ross Kemp, you will recognise the phenomenon. In the first visit, Kemp accompanies heavily armed patrols in regular firefights. However, in the second documentary, filmed near the end of Operation Herrick, the gathering of fingerprints and retinal scans to build up an intelligence picture is to the fore. This makes the entire campaign more depressing because here are the lions, carrying on as best they could for months at a time, let down by the impossibility of their task. There was much to commend the British Army in Afghanistan. However, Sergio Miller makes it abundantly clear that it was a bitter conflict best avoided.

Reviewed by Toby Clark

Publisher: *Osprey/Bloomsbury*
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ISBN: *978-1-47286-829-9*
All formats: *592 pages*

RRP: *£30 (£21 eBook)*
Illustrations: *Yes*
References/notes: *Yes*
Appendices: *Yes*

Wings over Italy

The Story of Flight Sergeant Dennis Varey and 260 Squadron from El Alamein to the Liberation of Europe

WINGS OVER ITALY
THE STORY OF FLIGHT SERGEANT DENNIS VAREY and 260 SQUADRON FROM EL ALAMEIN TO THE LIBERATION OF EUROPE

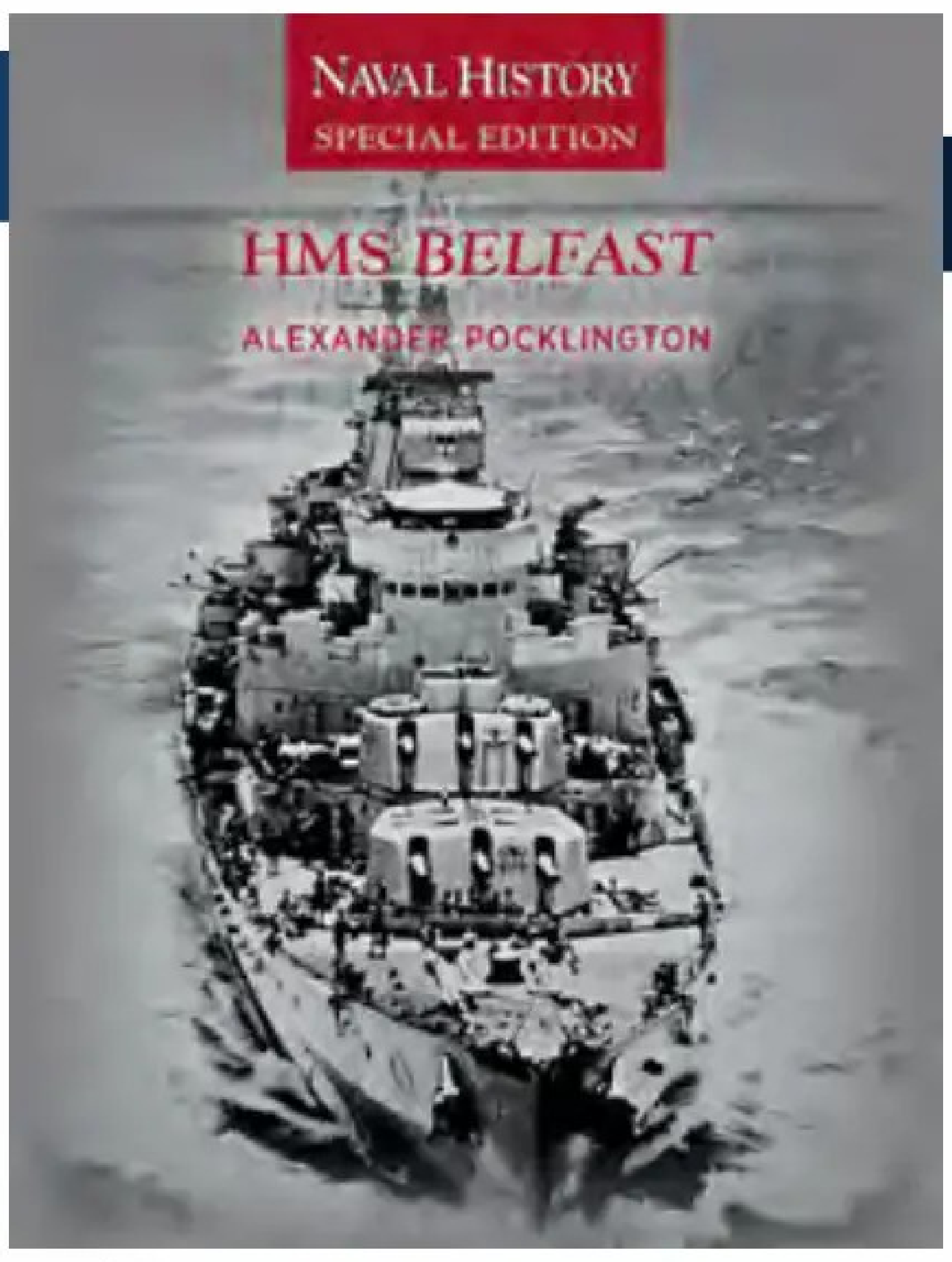
This very interesting account is really two books in one. The first relates the very personal story of Flight Sergeant Dennis Varey, a fighter pilot in Italy during 1944. Intertwined with this are described the actions of 260 Squadron, with which he served through North Africa, Sicily and Italy.

The author takes the reader through Varey's early life and training to his eventual posting to 260 Squadron in Italy in spring 1944 to fly Mustangs. He supported the fighting at Cassino, the breaching of the Gustav Line and the amphibious landings in Southern France, remaining on operations until being severely wounded in November, bringing his war to an end. Throughout, the author skilfully melds personal accounts, diaries and contemporary records to offer a highly readable account of a little-known unit and the life of 'one of the many'. Well worth the cover price.

Reviewed by Andrew Thomas

Author: Paul L Dawson
Publisher: Air World (pen-and-sword.co.uk)
ISBN: 978-1-03613-578-2
Hardback: 256 pages
RRP: £29.99

HMS Belfast



For those unfamiliar with Alexander Pocklington, the *BAW* contributor is a former civil engineer with a deep fascination with all things maritime. From recreating possible mixes for Greek fire, to producing authentic ships' rations, Alex is a man known to put his craft even before his health! His output – via his YouTube channel *Drachinifel* – is prolific.

His debut book, published as a special edition of *Naval History*, the magazine of the United States Naval Institute, is wholly focused on HMS *Belfast*. Enviable though Alex's reputation is, it does set a high bar, and I have two criticisms: first, the binding is rather fragile, so handle like eggs. Second, I want more!

Interweaved in the familiar story of a ship well known are intricate details often absent elsewhere, such as the retention of some QF 2-pounder 'pom-poms' over 40mm Bofors cannon because the former's belt feed made it more useful against kamikaze attackers. Here's another small detail: the ship's surviving QF 4-inch guns are a mix of manufacturers and ages due to wartime pressures to get any working gun installed. Or, did you know that the cruiser sortied into a Chinese bay to retrieve an RAF Vampire that had forced-landed on a beach? Another interesting facet is the mine that nearly sank *Belfast*: hit early in her career, *Belfast* was spared the breakers because of her newness, but her extensive repairs included the installation of new capabilities enhancing *Belfast's* versatility and helping to ensure she survived post-war axeing to become today's popular attraction.

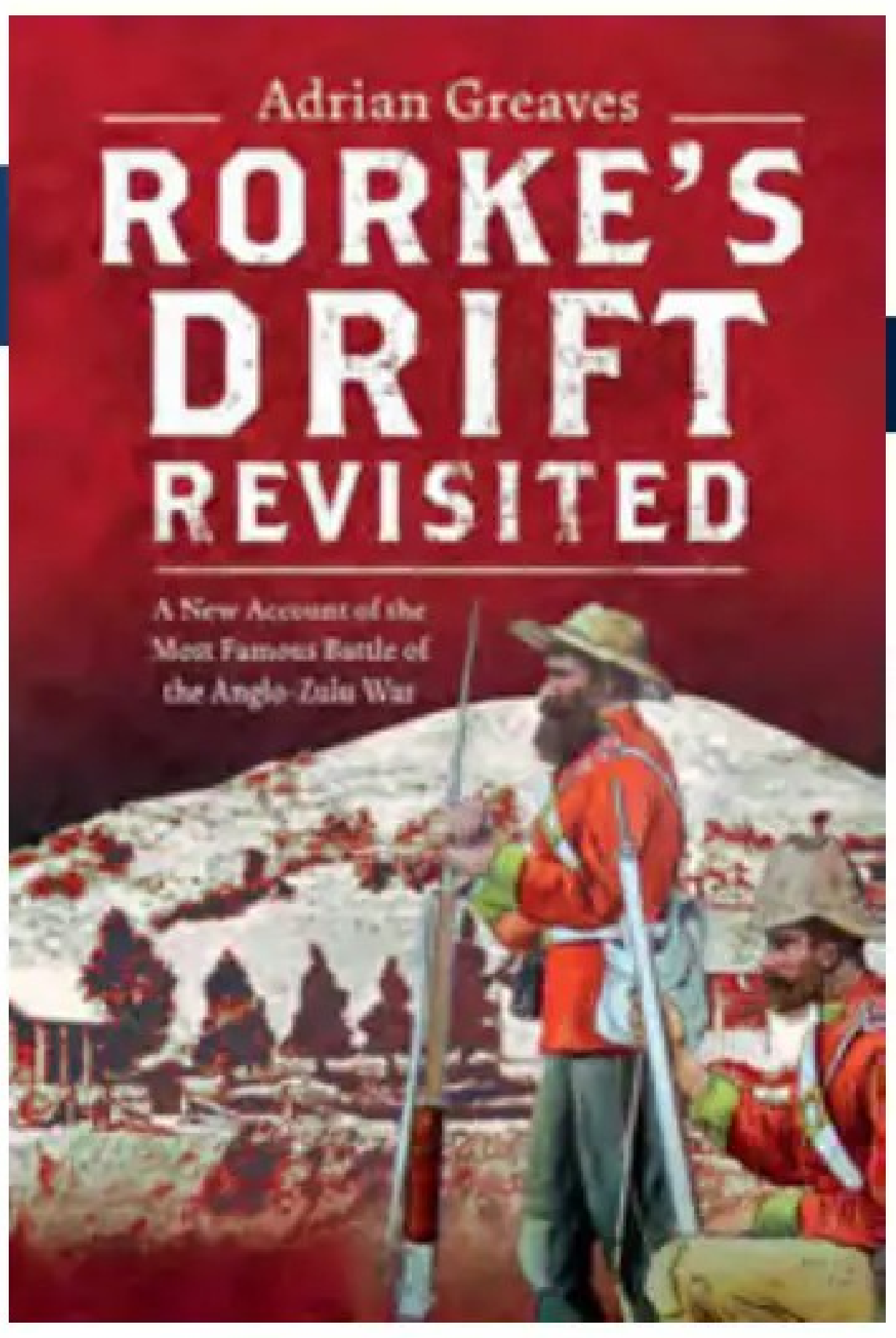
In typical Alex fashion, he has combined such detail in an accessible manner. He has set out to combine secondary sources with archival documents, the museum itself, and hundreds of hours of IWM sound recordings, into a short volume. This makes HMS *Belfast* the go-to companion for those new to its history, but also a handy reference for 'pros' filled with tables and first-hand accounts covering all aspects of her history from her design, the Battle of the North Cape, Korea, the decision to preserve her, and even her appearance in video game *World of Warships*.

Reviewed by John Ash

Author: Alexander Pocklington
Publisher: Naval History/USNI (usni.org)
ISBN: 978-1-68247-982-7
Paperback: 96 pages
RRP: £14.99 (via Blackwells UK)

Rorke's Drift Revisited

A New Account of the Most Famous Battle of the Anglo-Zulu War


Adrian Greaves
RORKE'S DRIFT REVISITED
A New Account of the Most Famous Battle of the Anglo-Zulu War

Despite the iconic status of Rorke's Drift, few accounts have managed to cut through the battle's myths. Dr Adrian Greaves, acknowledged as a world-leading expert on the Anglo-Zulu War, has produced a definitive new account that does just that.

Rather than a revision of his earlier work *Rorke's Drift*, this is a fresh appraisal – the product of decades of research in regimental archives, and drawing on overlooked eyewitness testimony, official papers and the latest archaeological findings. Greaves dismantles several entrenched legends, like the dubious authorship of the Chard Report. Even the famous biscuit box and mealie bag barricades, usually claimed to be a desperate improvisation, are shown to have been prepared days in advance. Greaves also demonstrates that the 24th Foot was not actually garrisoned in Wales in 1879, and few of its rank and file, nor its officers, were Cymry, proving that the rousing chorus of *Men of Harlech* sang in the film Zulu belongs to the realm of fiction.

Most compelling of all is the author's reconstruction of the defenders' lives. By tracing their backgrounds and often bleak post-battle fates, Greaves offers a moving counterpoint to the heroics of popular memory. Few lived long or prospered after 1879, and the stories uncovered here lend the book a poignant human depth.

This work is richly detailed and grounded in a lifetime's expertise. For anyone considering writing anew on the battle, this book sets the bar impossibly high.

Reviewed by Tom Baker

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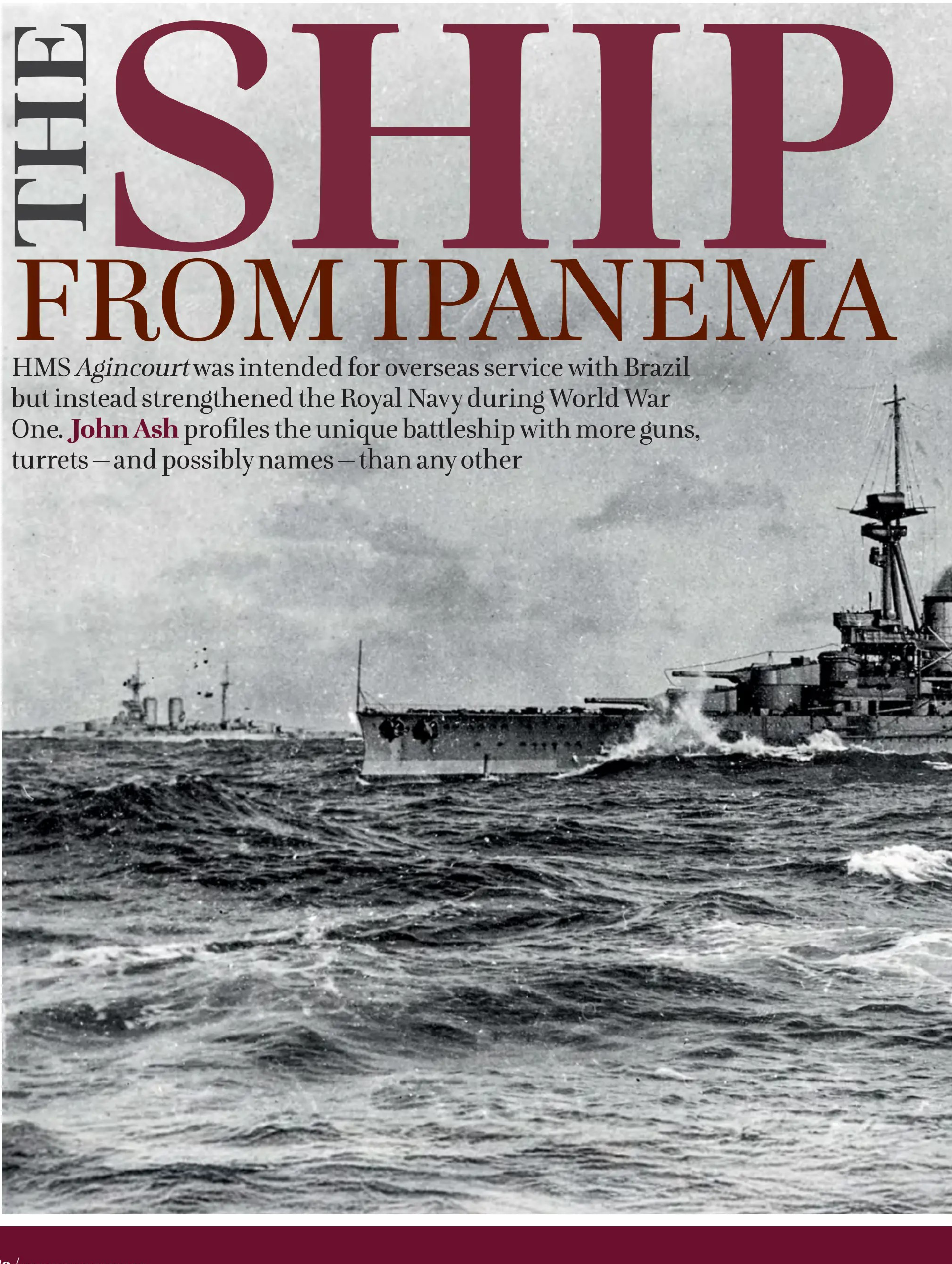
THE SHIP FROM IPANEMA

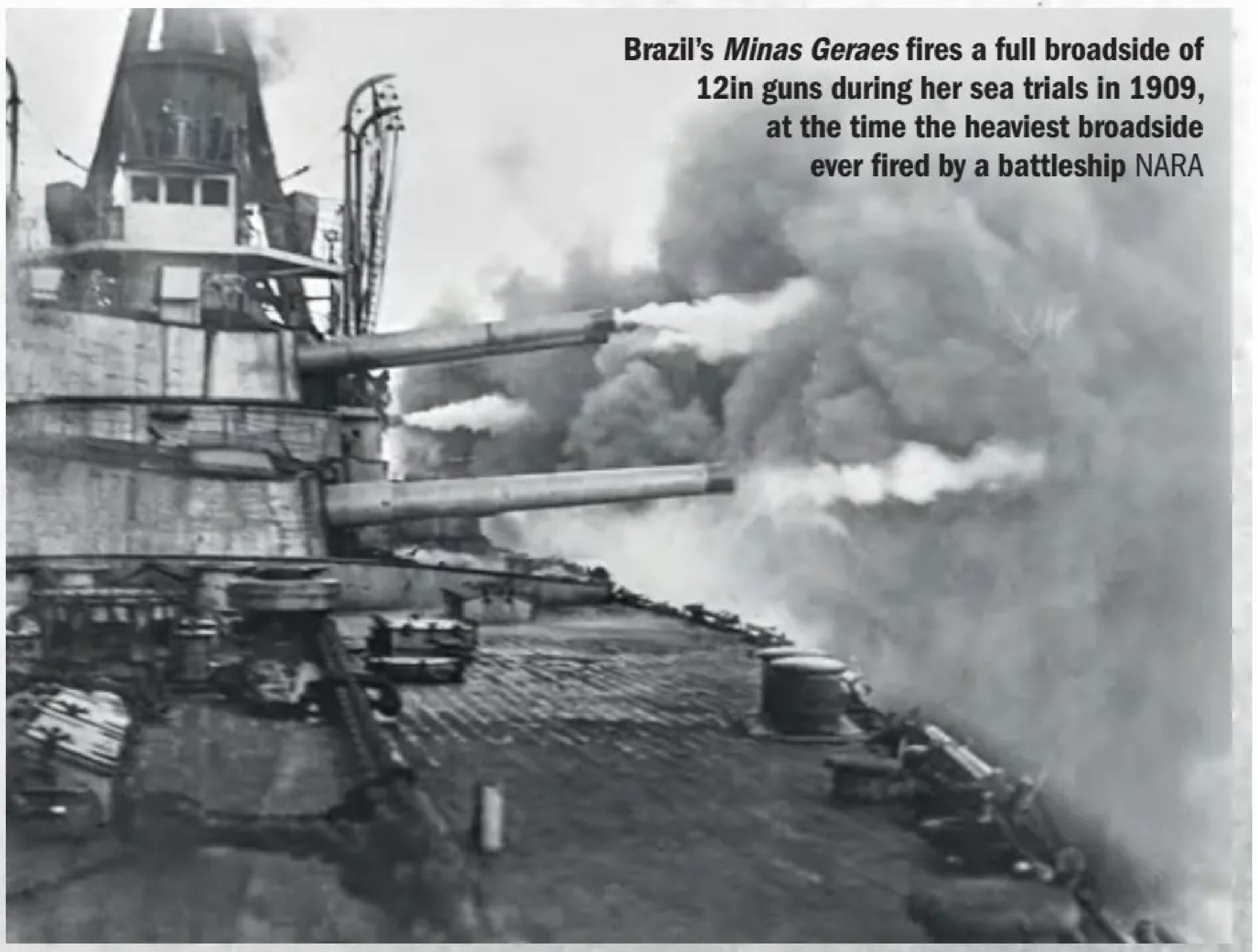
HMS *Agincourt* was intended for overseas service with Brazil but instead strengthened the Royal Navy during World War One. **John Ash** profiles the unique battleship with more guns, turrets – and possibly names – than any other



In 1914, Britain remained the undisputed naval power. The Royal Navy had maintained a quantitative edge in capital ships over Germany and others by outproducing them, even after the 1906 launch of HMS *Dreadnought* placed the naval powers back on par.

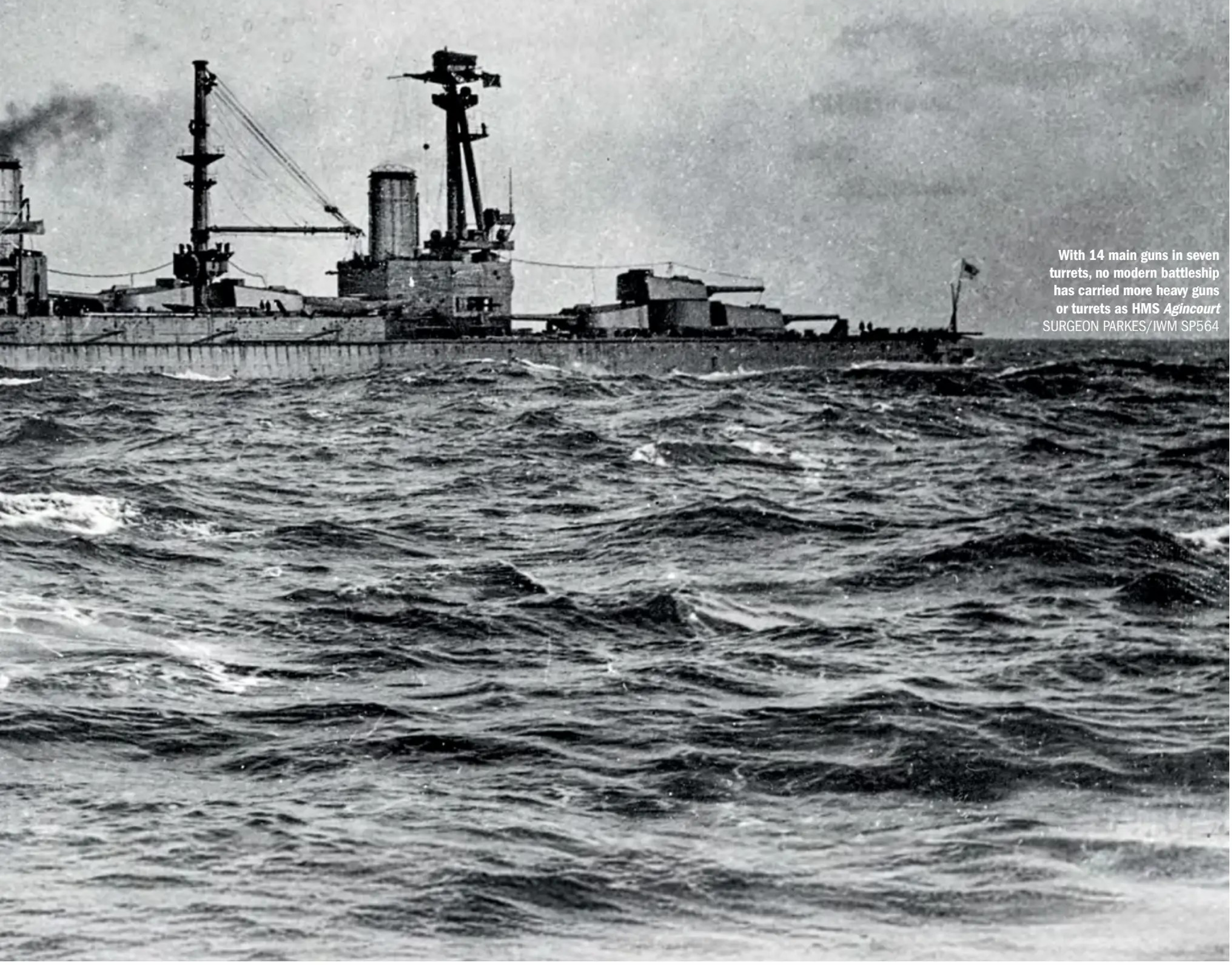
Britain's considerable shipyard capacity was able to build roughly five capital vessels for every two Germany could and although the Anglo-German naval arms race petered out in 1912, it was important to forge or maintain advantages in numbers and capability. Private enterprise steered development in ways even the Admiralty was not requesting, such as ever larger guns. At the same time, Britain built warships – including dreadnoughts – for foreign navies and, despite this, shipyards were desperate for work and some even closed.

Meanwhile, South America was host to a long-running naval arms race on the Southern Cone. Argentina, Brazil and Chile each jockeyed for position, but none was able to overcome the combined strength of the other two and Brazil had fallen behind. With the economies of each country booming – Brazil's thanks to its rubber plantations – each committed substantial resource to procuring modern, more powerful navies. However, each was also reliant on European or American shipbuilders to procure their foremost fighting vessels.


Brazil's *Minas Geraes* fires a full broadside of 12in guns during her sea trials in 1909, at the time the heaviest broadside ever fired by a battleship NARA

Big guns in the Southern Cone

What became *Agincourt* was not Brazil's first British-built battleship. The nation attempted to build its own capital ships, but its plans were scrapped after the British introduced *Dreadnought*. Brazil, seeking to take


With 14 main guns in seven turrets, no modern battleship has carried more heavy guns or turrets as HMS *Agincourt* SURGEON PARKES/IWM SP564

The ***Sultan Osman I Evvel*** **being fitted out on the Tyne in 1914** THE ENGINEER

> ***"The new battleship so far as known is the largest battleship under construction"***
>
> Bulletin of the International Bureau of the American Republics

advantage of the great leveller to catch its peers, ordered two Minas Geraes-class ships.

This made Brazil the third power to have dreadnoughts under construction (albeit in British shipyards) after the British and the Americans, and there were concerns Brazil could not need the world's most powerful warships, and it was acting as a front. When *Minas Geraes* and *São Paulo* were commissioned in 1910, it was a leap in capability for Brazil. At the time they were ordered, there was no warship of greater power in build. Both had a dozen 12in guns in six turrets – two of which were superfiring – and could train ten guns on a single target in what was then the heaviest broadside ever fired. The pair locked Brazil into a resurgent naval race with Argentina and Chile, the former ordering larger dreadnoughts with 12in guns from American shipyards, the latter purchasing vessels from Britain with an all-centreline 14in gun armament.

The supremacy of Brazil's battleships was therefore shortlived. Accordingly, and locked into a contract for a third battleship, Brazil sought to modify the design of what was to be the *Rio de Janeiro* and mooted procuring a fourth (*Riachuelo*). *Rio*'s keel was laid at Armstrong Whitworth's Elswick shipyard in Newcastle upon Tyne in March 1910. Brazil again pushed for the world's most powerful dreadnought: "The new battleship [...] so far as known is the largest battleship under construction," reported the July 1910 *Bulletin of the International Bureau of the American Republics*. "The contract calls for the construction of the battleship for approximately $14,500,000. The *Rio Janeiro* [sic] will be almost twice the size of the original *Dreadnought*."

Brazil aimed to acquire a ship with a dozen 14in guns or even one with eight 16in guns, but the costs became prohibitive and Brazil accepted a proposal to produce a longer battleship with seven centreline turrets and 14 12in guns. No dreadnought-era battleship before or since has boasted more main guns or turrets.

However, as early as 1910, with politico-social unrest that was extending into its navy, plus a now struggling economy, it became clear Brazil could no longer afford the battleship and, in 1913, it sold *Rio de Janeiro* to the Ottoman Empire for £2,750,000.

Marble and mahogany

The Ottomans, like the Brazilians, were locked in an arms race, revitalising the navy to stand against the expanding and modernising Greek fleet in the Balkans and the Russians in the Black Sea. The Turks renamed the ship *Sultan Osman I Evvel*, and in addition to *Rio*, purchased a second battleship from the British, *Reşadiye*, a 25,000-tonner capable of 21kts and armed with ten Vickers-designed BL 13.5in Mk.VI guns.

In the *Reşadiye*, the Ottomans wanted a design equal to any other ship afloat or in build. However, the larger *Sultan Osman*, while less powerful, was eyed as a flagship. She received a lavishly furnished admiral's quarters featuring copious marble and mahogany and a large wardroom befitting the anticipated role. She received modifications to her accommodation to suit national requirements, including Turkish-style bathrooms and heads. *Sultan Osman* represented more than a third of spending power allocated to Turkey's new warships, with government cuts and public subscription utilised to raise money for them – women sold their hair as part of the fundraising effort, and the purchase was viewed though a lens of heavy public interest.

During the 1914 July Crisis, a liner arrived on the Tyne with the ship's future captain and 500 crewmen, but the British were unsure of the Ottoman Empire's allegiance in the coming war. Delivery was expected for August 2, and Armstrong and Vickers (*Reşadiye*'s builders) were leant on to slow down fitting out. With several battleships being built for overseas customers, the British offered to buy each for use against the Germans, with the intention to sell them back once the war was won or otherwise compensate customers. Chile accepted, its dreadnoughts becoming HMS *Canada* and the aircraft carrier HMS *Eagle*.

The Ottomans were offered the same deal, but with a daily stipend of £1000 for their use so long as the Turks remained neutral. They refused and planned to take ownership. Winston Churchill, the First Lord of the Admiralty, ordered them seized. The builders were informed on July 31, and, anticipating trouble with the Turkish crew, a company of the Sherwood Foresters boarded

Agincourt **at anchor in Portsmouth after her seizure by the Royal Navy but before her reworking** HULTON/GETTY

Agincourt **displaced more, was longer than and faster than many of the Royal Navy's superdreadnought battleships, such as the 1914-comissioned HMS *Benbow* of the Iron Duke-class** SURGEON PARKES/IWM SP1885

Sultan Osman on August 2. The seizure of the battleships caused outcry in Turkey, the confiscation used as part of the justifications to enter the war on Germany's side.

Renamed *Agincourt*, she was commissioned on August 7 and arrived at Scapa Flow and the Grand Fleet's Fourth Battle Squadron on August 26. *Reşadiye* became HMS *Erin*.

A turret for each day of the week

Agincourt was unique and debate continues as to whether she was a superdreadnought as she was such a design compromise, yet the quantity of heavy guns she carried cannot be ignored. The ship's stand-out feature was this armament, with seven twin turrets taking up 50% of deck space. The normal British convention of naming turrets was with 'A' and 'B' at the bow, 'P' and 'Q' amidships or on the wings, and 'X' and 'Y' at the stern. Instead, *Agincourt*'s were designated by 1 to 7 and unofficially named for the days of the week, starting with 'A'/No.1 – Sunday.

She had 14 guns thanks to Brazilian politicking, says historian David Topliss. It was a necessity the ship appeared more powerful than its predecessors, but, unable to increase calibre, the only option was to increase the number of guns. *Agincourt* was armed with 14 EOC 12in 45-calibre guns – designated the BL 12in Mk.XIII – which were unique to the Royal Navy, but also equipped several Japanese ships. The performance of the Elswick gun (an improved version of the gun installed on the Minas Geraes-class) was similar to the Vickers Mk.X 12in gun in British service.

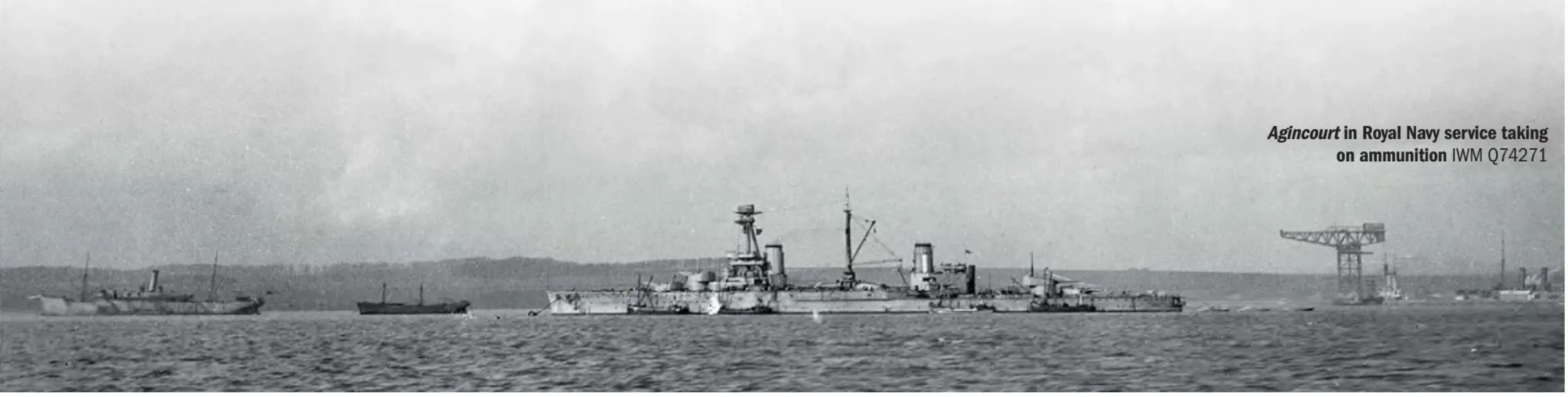
> ***"Debate continues as to whether Agincourt was a superdreadnought as she was such a design compromise, yet the quantity of heavy guns she carried cannot be ignored"***

Agincourt's guns were capable of firing one-and-a-half rounds per minute out to 18,630 yards using 4CRH shells and able to defeat 12in of armour at 7,600 yards. Total broadside weight was slightly above 12,000lb. It was widely stated that had *Agincourt* fired a full broadside, she would capsize or break apart. This was untrue, but reinforcing girders were fitted to counter hull stresses and the quarterdeck was strengthened to support the turrets there.

Agincourt's turrets had a maximum elevation of 13.5°, although the turrets were modified (probably not before 1917) to increase this to 16°, improving range to 20,400 yards. Each turret had an armoured rangefinder, though the fire-control suite was upgraded after the Royal Navy took the ship and the foretop received an additional rangefinder by 1917. According to naval historian Norman Friedman, *Agincourt* was likely the only British capital ship at Jutland without a Dreyer fire-control table – an early mechanical computer designed for centralised fire control and considered too secret to export. Other sources suggest *Erin* was similarly lacking or that the systems had been fitted but were not ready.

The ship's secondary armament was also the world's heaviest for the time: 18 Elswick BL 6in/50 Mk.XIII guns – 14 in armoured casemates. The guns, originally exclusively for export, were similar to Britain's 6in Mk.XI gun and used the same ammunition. They were capable of seven rounds per minute, lobbing 100lb 4CRH shells 13,500 yards. After the British requisitioned the ship, two more were added abreast the bridge, although six guns were later disconnected from the secondary fire control systems and reserved for anti-aircraft use.

Close in protection was provided through ten QF 12-pounder (3in/50 20cwt) Mk.Is mounted in gun shields in the superstructure.



Agincourt **in Royal Navy service taking on ammunition** IWM Q74271

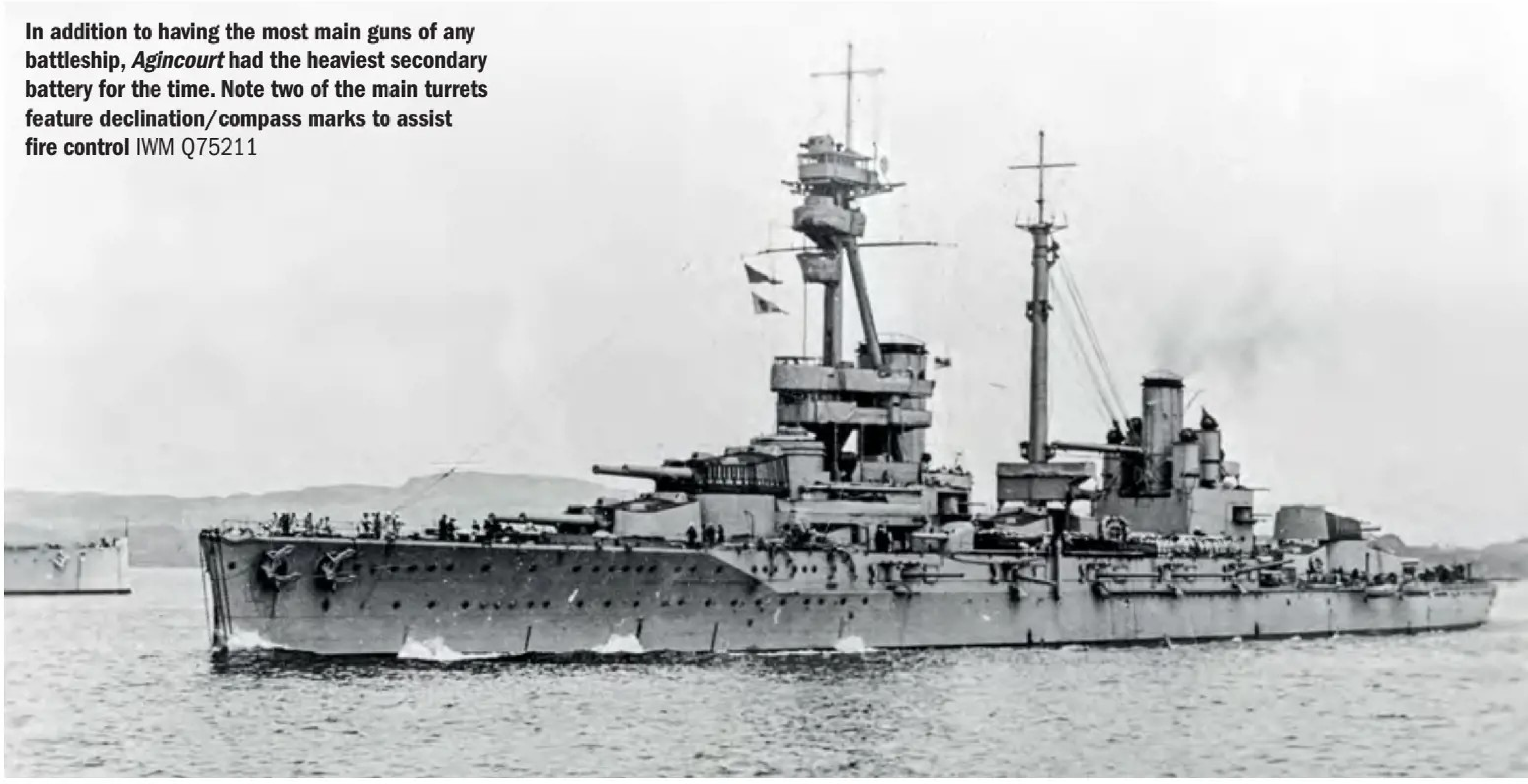
TO SAVE A SHIP

Once earmarked for disposal, a new lease of life beckoned for *Agincourt*. After a brief period of service as an experimental ship, plans – ROSYTH M.C.D. 9579. 8-12-1921 – were drafted to convert her into a mobile depot and headquarters for naval/amphibious operations. Likely deemed suitable due to her size, large internal spaces and relative newness, the concept was to develop a ship that could move under its own power and self-deploy as a facility to support operations against a far-flung potential adversary such as the United States or Japan.

The conversion required five main turrets be removed (leaving her superfiring turrets) and the empty barbettes converted into workshops or storage spaces. Although the plans show several of the ship's 6in guns being retained, the presence of a new 5.5in magazine suggests some were to be swapped out for the BL 5.5in Mk.I.

Agincourt would also have received additional cranes and derricks, provision to store and deploy mines and sweeping gear, torpedo and depth charge maintenance workshops/stowage, a large boat deck for several 42ft and 50ft motor launches, a large bakery and an armoury for small arms and 12-pounder field guns. She was also to carry an Inglis portable bridge, Nissan huts, horse boats and a motor pool for lorries and other transport.

However, the innovative project never left the drawing board and *Agincourt* went to the breakers.



In addition to having the most main guns of any battleship, *Agincourt* had the heaviest secondary battery for the time. Note two of the main turrets feature declination/compass marks to assist fire control IWM Q75211

With all 14 guns trained to port for a broadside, *Agincourt* follows *Erin* into a starboard turn, 1918 US NHHC

Agincourt also featured three 21in torpedo tubes with one astern and one to each side.

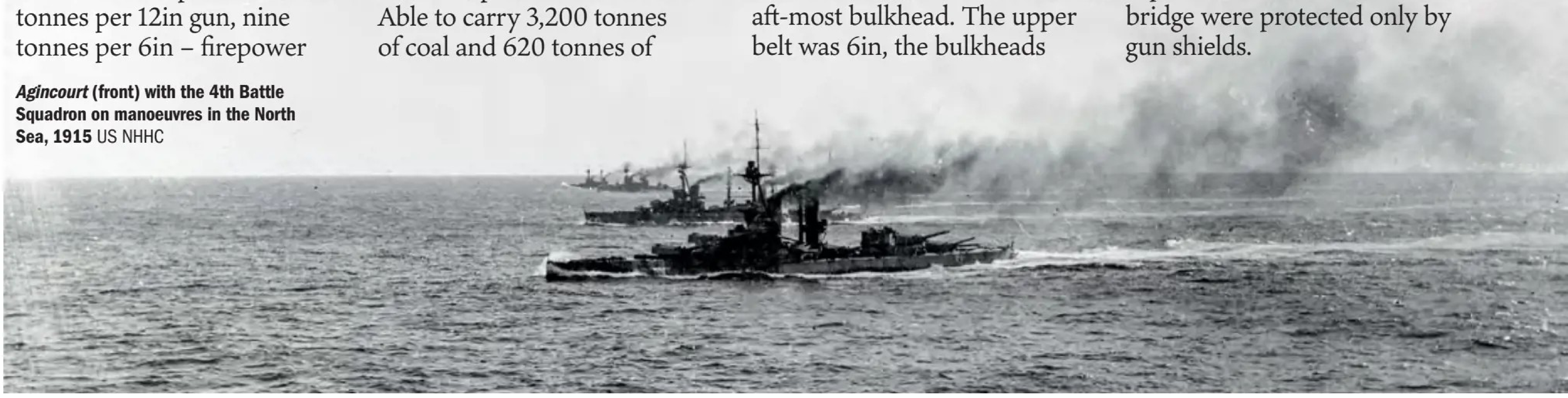
Glass thoroughbred

At 460 tonnes per turret, 57½ tonnes per 12in gun, nine tonnes per 6in – firepower contributed a significant amount of *Agincourt's* displacement. More was allocated to propulsion and machinery spaces, with 22 Babcock tube boilers generating 34,000shp, powering four Parsons turbines spinning four 9½ft three-bladed propellers.

Agincourt, at 30,800-tonnes (full load) and 671½ft long, dwarfed even the Royal Navy's superdreadnoughts, but could attain 22kts. In trials, it was found that she could raise 40,000shp for another ½kt. Able to carry 3,200 tonnes of coal and 620 tonnes of fuel oil (to spray on the coal, improving performance), she could maintain 10kts for 7,000nmi. In the Royal Navy, only the Queen Elizabeth-class battleships displaced more and were faster, and this advantage enabled *Agincourt* to better control engagements.

However, something had to give. While most contemporary British battleships had a main belt about 12in thick, *Agincourt* boasted just 9in of protection across its main belt, thinning to 4in toward the bow and the aft-most bulkhead. The upper belt was 6in, the bulkheads 3-6in and the barbettes were weak – 9in at most – but all except three were unarmoured beneath the main deck. Initially, the magazines were protected by two additional layers of armour totalling 2.5in.

The most heavily protected parts of the ship were the turret faces and conning tower, both 12in. The turret sides were 8in thick and the roofs 3in. The casemate-mounted 6in guns were protected by 6in of plate, but those up in the superstructure or astride the bridge were protected only by gun shields.



***Agincourt* (front) with the 4th Battle Squadron on manoeuvres in the North Sea, 1915** US NHHC

Ships of the 1st Battle Squadron – *Agincourt*'s parent formation – underway in 1916, possibly taken from *Agincourt*'s stern IWM Q17885

Agincourt also featured fewer subdivisions than other Royal Navy battleships due to her Brazilian specification to prioritise comfort in a tropical operating environment. Overall, *Agincourt*'s protective qualities were more in line with Britain's battlecruisers – less of a problem for its envisaged owner, but problematic for the Royal Navy as she was never designed to be placed in a battleline. Neither Brazil nor the Turks could afford to create a battleline, and the ship was optimised to fight multiple inferior vessels, using speed to dictate the engagement.

After the British seized *Agincourt*, modifications were made. The flying bridge running above the amidships turrets was removed, Turkish-style facilities were replaced and the torpedo netting deleted – though many of the ship's instruction plates remained in Portuguese into 1917.

Baptism of fire

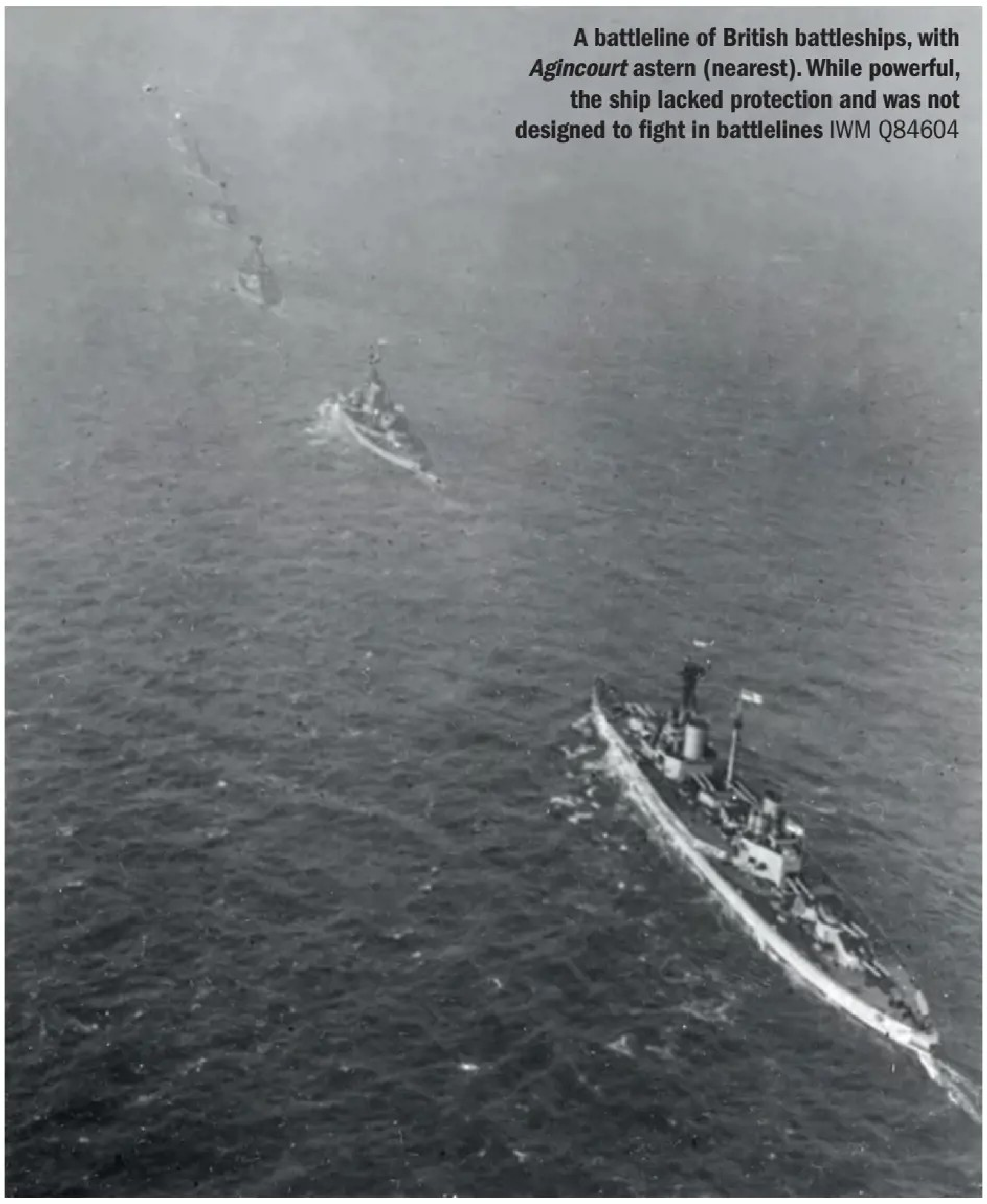
As *Agincourt* was so quickly added to Royal Navy strength, there was no waiting crew. The ship's first commander, Captain Douglas Nicholson, arrived from the Royal Yacht, as did a portion of the crew. Others were taken from training and military prisoners with commuted sentences also helped form her 1,115-strong complement. The crew nicknamed her the 'Gin Palace' due to the large, ornate spaces and preference for pink gin among officers. 'Gin Court' was another moniker, derived from A-gin-court.

Agincourt had a quiet 18 months at Scapa, exercising between sweeps of the North Sea. It was learned she was a good and stable gun platform. She transferred into the 6th Division of the 1st Battle Squadron prior to Jutland. This formation was an odd one, its battleships – *Agincourt*, *Hercules*, *Revenge* and the flagship *Marlborough* – all from different classes.

The Battle of Jutland, which started on May 31, 1916, was *Agincourt*'s first and only combat action. The ship's commander, Captain Henry Doughty, who had previously captained the monitor *Abercrombie* off Gallipoli and was praised for his gunnery. The 6th Division was on the starboard side of the Grand Fleet and, at times, were the closest battleships to the German High Seas Fleet. They had to complete a hazardous turn at 'Windy Corner', where they came under heavy fire. At 1824hrs, *Agincourt* engaged German battlecruisers and soon turned its secondaries onto enemy destroyers, dodging two torpedoes, though *Marlborough* was hit.

Agincourt's Lieutenant Horatio Westmacott reported: "Great columns of water sprang up all around us caused by the big shells fired at us, they sent up a column higher than the mast of the ship, the ship ahead of us was straddled, viz three shots short and two over, luckily not hit and we saw the water

> *"Agincourt's commander arrived from the Royal Yacht as did a portion of the ship's crew. Others were taken from training schools and military prisoners with commuted sentences also helped form her complement"*



A battleline of British battleships, with *Agincourt* astern (nearest). While powerful, the ship lacked protection and was not designed to fight in battlelines IWM Q84604

HMS *AGINCOURT* VS CONTEMPOARY DREADNOUGHT BATTLESHIPS

	Agincourt	*Erin*	Iron Duke-class	Rivadavia-class	König-class
Country:	Britain	Britain	Britain	Argentina	Germany
In service:	1914-22	1914-22	1914-46	1914-56	1914-19
Displacement (full load):	30,860 tonnes	25,655 tonnes	29,500 tonnes	30,100 tonnes	28,600 tonnes
Length:	671½ft (205m)	559½ft (170.5m)	622¾ft (190m)	594¾ft (181m)	575½ft (175.4m)
Propulsion:	22 boilers powering 4 turbines, 34,000shp	15 boilers powering 4 turbines, 26,500shp	18 boilers powering 4 turbines, 29,000shp	18 boilers powering 3 turbines, 40,000shp	15 boilers powering 3 turbines, 31,000shp
Max. speed/range:	22kts/7,000nmi	21kts/5,300nmi	21.25kts/7,780nmi	22.5kts/11,000nmi	21kts/8,000nmi
Main armament:	14 x EOC 12in/45	10 x BL 13.5in Mk.VI	10 x BL 13.5in Mk.V	12 x 12in/50 Bethlehem	10 x 30.5cm SK L/50 (12in)
Secondary armament:	20 x BL 6in Mk.XIII, 10 x QF 3in 20 cwt	16 x BL 6in Mk.XVI, 6 x 6-pounder (2.25in)	12 x BL 6in Mk.VII, 2 x QF 3in 20 cwt	12 x 6in/50, 14 x 4in/50	14 x 15cm SK L/45 (5.9in), 10 x 8.8cm SK L/45 (3.5in)
Torpedoes:	3 x 21in tubes	4 x 21in tubes	4 x 21in tubes	2 x 21in tubes	5 x 50cm (19.7in) tubes
Armour (at thickest):	9in (belt), 12in (turret), 2½in (deck)	12in (belt), 11in (turret), 3in (deck)	12in (belt), 11in (turrets), 2.5in (deck)	12in (belt), 12in (turrets), 2½in (deck)	13.8in (belt), 12in (turrets), 3.9in (deck)
Complement:	1,268	1,064	1,022	1,130	1,136

streaming off her as if she had plunged into a heavy sea. We were hit by splinters from the shells bursting but no direct hit and very little damage done. The decks a bit scored in places and most of the boats had a hole of two in them."

Around 1915hrs, *Agincourt* engaged a battleship but scored no hits. However, witnesses claimed the flash and smoke caused by her broadsides made the ship appear as it had suffered a catastrophic explosion, as fire and smoke belched along its length. One officer, inside a main turret, believed the ship had taken a serious hit after he heard a violent explosion that was actually a 6in broadside.

Separated from the Grand Fleet after *Marlborough* was left listing by the torpedo hit, the 6th Division encountered the crippled *Seydlitz* but did not open fire as they could not establish its identity – yet another way the lucky *Seydlitz* survived a battle in which she should have succumbed. The next morning, at 0352hrs, *Agincourt* unsuccessfully engaged a zeppelin.

At Jutland, *Agincourt* fired 144 12in shells and 111 6in shells, but no hits were recorded despite claims in her captain's report. Westmacott, the control officer for the secondaries, also noted: "I opened fire at 9,000yds and managed to cripple one [destroyer], for we counted five direct hits and the rest then turned away without getting in their attack. I did not see it sink but our destroyers must have finished it off alright."

Agincourt was plagued by two issues at Jutland, lacking the superior fire-control systems otherwise available to the Grand Fleet's battleships, limiting accuracy. Also, her secondaries were slowed by shell hoist issues. According to historian John Campbell, almost all British capital ships suffered from this, and once all ready-use shells had been consumed, the fire rate of *Agincourt*'s 6in guns fell to three rounds per minute.

A hasty ending

Post-Jutland, *Agincourt* participated in further Grand Fleet's sorties and transferred to the 2nd Battle Squadron to provide cover to convoys to and from Scandinavia. Fire directors were installed in the foretop for the main guns, and more each side of the ship for the secondaries. By 1917, the main guns could be directed from the foretop in the main conning tower, the spotting top in the aft tower or from Nos 2 and 6 turrets. With extra fittings installed, including searchlights and anti-aircraft guns, the ship's complement swelled to 1,268. In 1918, two 6in guns were removed.

On November 21, 1918, *Agincourt* was present at the surrender of the High Seas Fleet and the following year she was offered back to Brazil without success. She was listed for disposal in April 1921, having been in commission for just seven years, it being known the Washington Naval Treaty (signed in 1922) would lead to Britain's 12in gun-armed ships being scrapped to meet tonnage restrictions. *Agincourt* was sold for scrap in December 1922, but disposal work did not take place for some time and, in 1924, she was cut in half to comply with the treaty. So ended the life of a unique battleship that was always a stranger to Britain's shores. BW

A TWIST IN THE TALE

Although *Agincourt* was scrapped in the 1920s, there is a final twist to her tale. *Agincourt*'s 6in guns were removed during dismantling and placed into storage with many of these reused in coastal batteries during World War Two. However, four returned to sea.

Commissioned in World War One, the Insect-glass gunboats *Aphis* and *Ladybird* were rearmed in 1939 with their original 6in/45 Mk.VIIs replaced by the longer-barrel guns from *Agincourt*. *Ladybird*, a survivor of the 1937 Panay Incident, was lost off Tobruk in 1941. *Aphis* spent the war in the Mediterranean and, in 1945, redeployed to the Far East. She was scrapped in Singapore in 1947.

Although three such 6in guns survive in Britain and in Chile, none are from *Agincourt*/*Aphis*, being Mk.XVII pieces with at least one having been mounted on HMS *Canada*.

Agincourt **(foreground) at Scapa Flow in 1918. Immediately behind her is *Erin*** US NHHC

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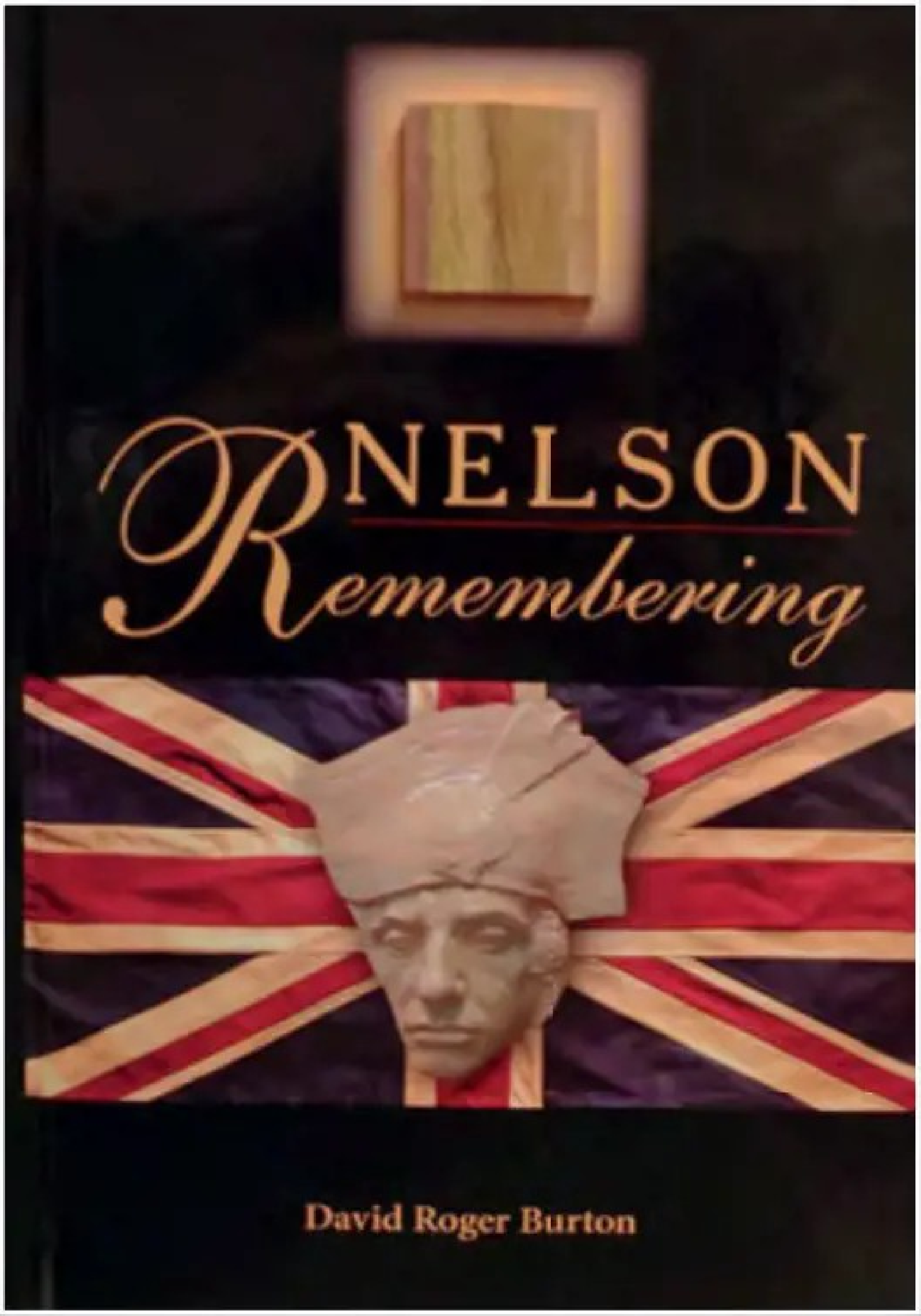

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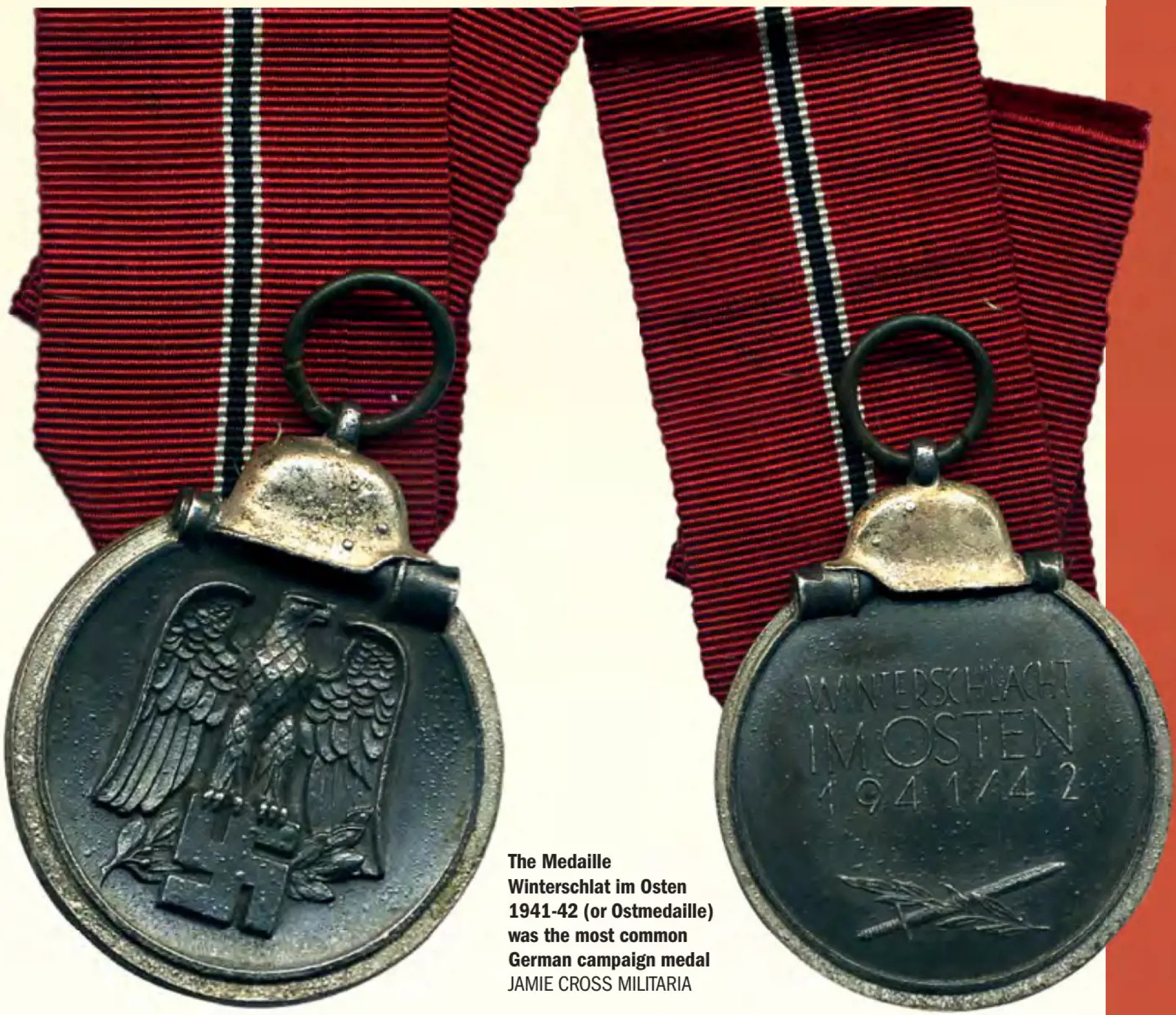
MILITARIA MATTERS

Duncan Evans is your guide to the world of militaria collectables, this month looking at the conflict on the Eastern Front in World War Two



The Medaille Winterschlat im Osten 1941-42 (or Ostmedaille) was the most common German campaign medal JAMIE CROSS MILITARIA

There's a case to be made that if Adolf Hitler hadn't launched Operation Barbarossa in 1941, then most of Europe would be speaking German today. It's an interesting premise for alternative histories and debate, but the fact is he did and it didn't end well.

The sheer scale of the fighting on the Eastern Front tends to get downplayed, but it also means that there's a lot of collectable militaria. About ten years ago we also started to see what is now a thriving market for what are termed 'relics.' These are items lost on the battlefields, ending up covered in mud or at the bottom of swamps for 80-odd years, before being dug up by metal detectorists. As German militaria is on a never-ending upwards trajectory in terms of cost, relics are a more affordable alternative, as they are usually cheaper because of their condition. Yet they have more of a story to tell than a helmet that was in a surplus store warehouse and never used.

Let's start though, with a German medal awarded for service in the east, the Medaille Winterschlat im Osten 1941-42 (Medal for the Winter Battle in the East 1941-42), more commonly known as the Ostmedaille or Eastern Front medal. It was designed by Unterscharfuhrer Ernst Krause of the Leibstandarte-SS 'Adolf Hitler', instituted on May 26, 1942, and awarded to those who saw service on the Eastern Front between November 15, 1941, and April 15, 1942. To qualify, personnel had to have spent two weeks on the frontline or 60 days in the general combat zone. However, if wounded at any point, the time served criteria were waived and it was automatically awarded. German troops rather fatalistically nicknamed it the 'frozen meat medal'!

The medal was made from a grey zinc-based alloy, unlike most early war medals which were made from tombak, and had a dish shape, with a concave obverse and a convex reverse. At the top of the medal

Original, good condition German M40 helmets command a decent sum, especially... GRENADIER MILITARIA is a helmet over a grenade, to which the suspension was fixed. Both the helmet and the outer border had a frosted silver finish, while the rest of the medal was gun metal blue-grey. The obverse featured the national eagle clutching a swastika over a laurel wreath. On the reverse you had the words 'WINTERSCLACHT IMOSTEN 1941/42' over a crossed sword and laurel wreath. The ribbon was quite distinctive, being dark red with a central black stripe, surrounded by thin white stripes; the red represented blood, the white was for snow and the black was to commemorate Germany's fallen.

Originally, the Ostmedaille was only awarded to the Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS, but from January 20, 1943, until it was decommissioned on September 4, 1944, eligibility was expanded to cover foreign auxiliaries and male/female non-combatants in the Wehrmacht. They started to be handed out in July 1942 until October 1944, at which point more than 4,000,000 had been awarded, making it the most common German wartime campaign medal. Because of that, it's the most affordable today, with prices around £50 for one in average condition and a manufacturer stamp on the suspension ring. Versions from rare manufacturers go for more, and if it comes in the packet of issue you're looking at £75. A grubby version with no finish or lacquer can be as cheap as £35-£40. Jamie Cross Militaria (thirdreichmedals.com) has two in that condition, with a couple of wear and tear spots and a dull finish.

You're not really going to get much of a discount on an Eastern Front medal relic, because they are so plentiful, but a German helmet is another matter.

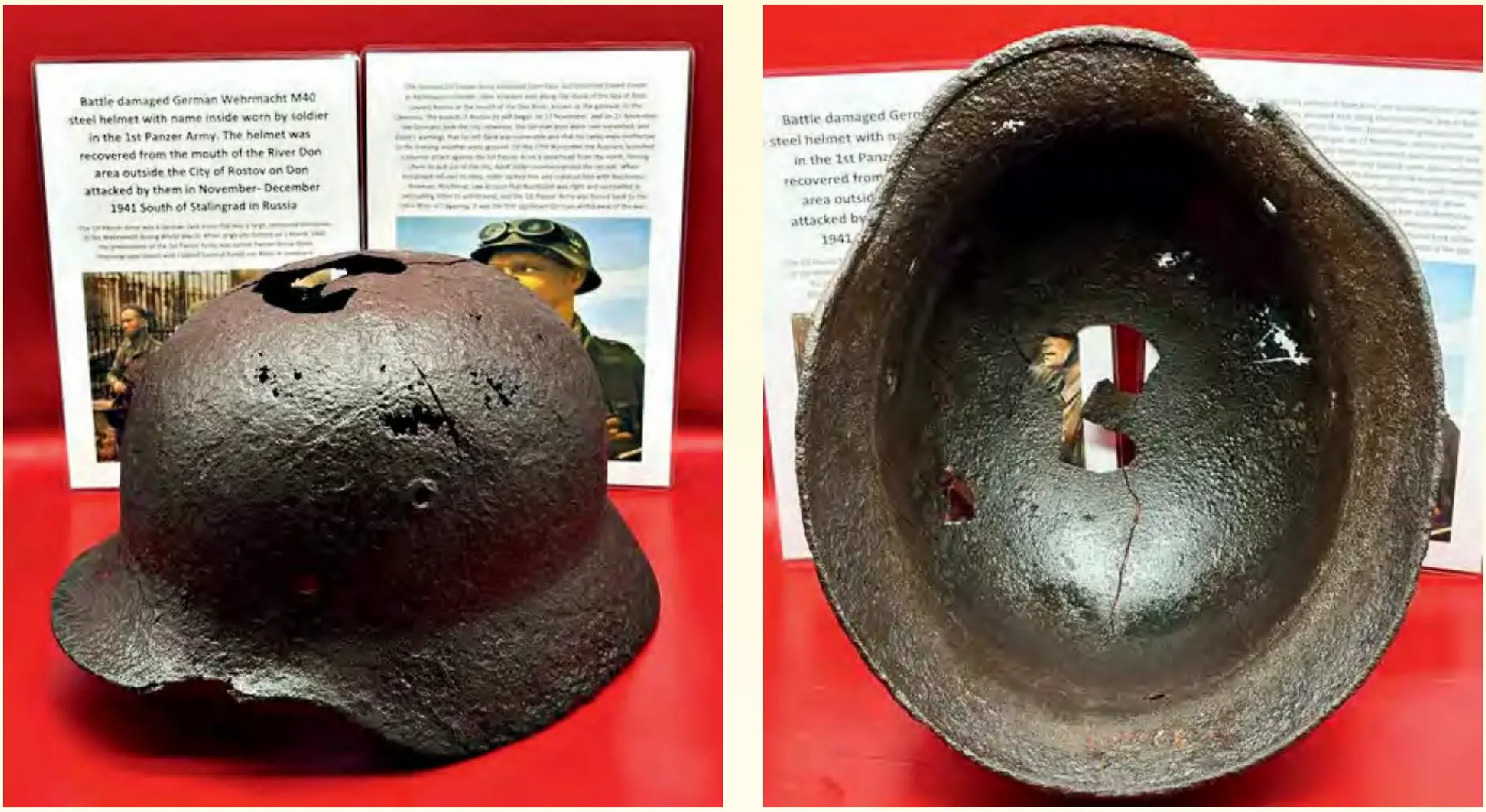
> *"As German militaria is on a never-ending upwards trajectory in terms of cost, relics are a more affordable alternative and yet they have more of a story to tell than a helmet found in a surplus store"*

...with an intact lining and decal
GRENADIER MILITARIA

Stahlhelm development began after World War One with Dr Friedrich Schwerd coming up with the design shape. This culminated in the M1935 or M35 model, made from pressed sheets of steel with ventilator holes and a leather liner that made it more compact, comfortable and lighter than previous versions. The new design was accepted into service on June 25, 1935, replacing all other designs.

Over a million M35 helmets were produced in the first two years, with millions more coming off the production line until it was revised in 1940 with the M40 version. This was only a minor revision to accommodate automated

Stalingrad was scene to a prolonged battle that devasted the city and led to the destruction of a German army
VIA AUTHOR


Battle damaged German Wehrmacht M40 steel helmet with name inside worn by soldier in the 1st Panzer Army. The helmet was recovered from the mouth of the River Don area outside the City of Rostov on Don attacked by them in November- December 1941 South of Stalingrad in Russia

Those seeking a unique piece of history may find an affordable alternative in relics, such as this recovered German M40 helmet RELICS FROM THE FRONT

The prices of German M42 helmets have soared in recent years GRENADIER MILITARIA

stamping processes that simplified the construction. The main change was stamping the ventilator holes directly into the helmet (known as the shell) rather than using separate fittings. Because of the similarity, you'll often see M40 helmets referred to as M35s and even the Germans themselves simply called all of these helmets M1935. The main revision actually came in 1942, when the cost of the war started to bite and materials were switched to cheaper metals, with the helmet part of that drive to reduce costs. The distinctive rolled edge of the M35 helmet was removed, giving the M42 versions a flared, rougher looking edge that gave marginally less protection but reduced the metal needed and sped up the production process.

The helmets were typically painted in the colours of the Heer (matte grey-green), the Luftwaffe (dark blue) or the Kriegsmarine (battleship grey). What makes the difference in terms of cost for collectors is what decals are affixed to the helmet, indicating which unit/branch they were for, and their condition. Decals themselves stopped being applied in 1943 in another attempt to speed up production.

Prices have really soared in the last five years, so a late-war M42, Heer helmet in great condition with no decals, would set you back £875 from Grenadier Militaria (grenadiermilitaria.com). Compare that to an M40 Heer helmet with a single decal, complete with original leather liner and maker's stamps, also from Grenadier, which costs £1,350.

Now let's take a look at a relic M40 helmet by comparison, available from Relics From The Front (relicsfromthefront.co.uk). There's a bit of green paintwork remaining on the outside, with more on the inside. There's an impact hole on the top and fragments of the decal remaining. Obviously, it's rusty and pitted, because it was dug out of the battlefield 80 years after the event. Where was it from, though? Well, it was worn by a soldier of the 1. Panzerarmee and was recovered from the mouth of the River Don area, outside of Rostov on Don, south of Stalingrad. The city was attacked by German forces in November-December 1941. The helmet also has the handwritten name of the soldier on the inside rim and it's in fairly solid condition. This is on sale for £80, which shows you the huge savings you can make with battlefield relics.

Track link rubber pad grooved pattern dated 1941 from German sdkfz 251 halftrack used by the 46th Panzer Corps recovered near the Village of Gnilets which was attacked by them during the opening offensive of operation citadel on 5th July 1943 during the attack on the Northern side of the Kursk salient from 5th July-12th July 1943 in Russia.

Interesting relics such as this rubber track shoe from a German halftrack can be yours for as little as £22 RELICS FROM THE FRONT

The other interesting thing about relic hunting is that you can find more obscure items, like vehicle parts. For example, Relics From The Front has a German track link rubber shoe with pad grooved pattern in very well used condition but pretty much complete. It's from a Sdkfz 251 half-track used by the XXXXVI Panzer Corps during an attack on the Kursk salient in July 1943. With free shipping, you can get this piece of history for just £22. BW

SAGE ADVICE

If you buy an Ostmedaille and find small irregularities around the grenade, don't worry – there were a lot of these made by different manufacturers so there are many small variations. The lacquer can also have a bubbling appearance, caused by overheating during the manufacturing process. Actual fakes tend to have poorly detailed or odd-shaped eagles, especially around the head and feet.

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Petty Officer Graham John Robert Libby, DSM

ELIZABETH II DEI GRATIA REGINA F.D.

Petty Officer Graham Libby, DSM

HERO *of the* MONTH

by Lord Ashcroft

The ARA *Belgrano* in January 1982, taken by a former naval cadet who sailed on the ship just 83 days before its final mission
SAMUEL SCORPIO

HMS *Conqueror* is best known for sinking the Argentinian cruiser ARA *General Belgrano* during the 1982 Falklands Conflict in an incident that is still controversial more than 40 years on. Yet for crew member Petty Officer Graham Libby, his greatest test came not at the actual time of the sinking, but less than a month later when he showed outstanding courage as a diver to solve a major problem faced by his submarine.

Graham John Robert Libby was born on December 2, 1958, in Portsmouth, Hampshire. The son of a Royal Navy diver, he was brought up and educated in the city before leaving school at 16. As a boy, he had initially wanted to join the Fire Brigade, but he eventually enlisted in the Royal Navy in 1975, aged 16. Two years later, he transferred to the Submarine Service and, like his father before him, was also one of the ship's divers.

By spring 1982, Libby had been serving aboard *Conqueror* – arguably the most famous British submarine ever launched – for three years. Some 285ft long, with a beam of 32ft, *Conqueror* was commissioned on November 9, 1971. She was a Churchill-class nuclear-powered submarine with a complement of more than 100 officers and crew. By late March 1982, after completing a three-month overseas deployment, *Conqueror* was back at her homebase of Faslane, on the eastern side of Gare Loch, Scotland, home to the 3rd Submarine Squadron. With the submarine in need of some repair work, her crew was given leave.

Sink the *Belgrano*

Just two days before Argentina's invasion of the Falkland Islands, and with diplomatic alarm bells ringing loud and clear, *Conqueror's* officers and men were ordered to return to the boat and prepare for war. Libby was one of those on leave at his home in Portsmouth on April 1, 1982. He told Mike Rossiter, the author of the book *Sink the Belgrano*: "I had only been there a few days when there was a knock on the door and there was this policeman stood there saying, 'You've been recalled. Make your way to the boat.' It was the morning of April 1 that he knocked and, and I thought, this is a wind-up, April fool!"

However, the policeman was deadly serious and Libby was soon back on duty. Under newly appointed Commander Christopher Wreford-Brown, *Conqueror* was soon sailing south, but with many of the crew convinced that the dispute would be settled by diplomacy.

Libby was the submarine's 'scratcher', the crewman responsible for the maintenance of the outer casing. Part of his role was to ensure that the capstans, winches and cables were all properly secured and that they made no noise when the boat was underway. In war, such noises could betray the submarine's position, resulting in it being torpedoed or bombed. Libby was also the most senior diver on board.

After nearly three weeks at sea, *Conqueror* was approaching South Georgia, 900 miles southeast of the Falklands. By this point, the British government had decided to retake South Georgia prior to mounting an attack on the Falkland Islands. At one point, *Conqueror* surfaced so that some SBS men on board could be picked up by helicopter and transferred to HMS *Antrim*, a County-class destroyer. However, just at the worst possible moment, one of the SBS men and Petty Officer Libby were hit by a huge wave that swept them into the bitterly cold sea.

Both men were rescued by helicopter and taken to *Antrim*, where they were placed in a cold bath while their circulation slowly improved. Libby spent six hours in recovery before being returned to his submarine, which had remained on the surface as engineers tried to repair its communications problems.

Once in the war zone, *Conqueror* was on the lookout for potential targets. On April 23, 1982, the British government made a statement that said Argentinian ships might be a target "if they could amount to a threat to interfere with the mission of British Forces in the South Atlantic." This went further than the government's earlier statement that had restricted targets to inside the 200-mile Total Exclusion Zone.

Soon, British Intelligence passed on information to Commander Wreford-Brown that a four-ship Argentinian convoy made up of the *Belgrano*, two destroyers and an oiler, was in his vicinity. On April 30, after detecting the *Belgrano*, Wreford-Brown decided to go closer, strongly suspecting his target would eventually come within firing range. On May 1, although the captains of both the *Conqueror* and the *Belgrano* were initially unaware of it, the fighting for the Falklands had started in earnest.

The final order to sink the *Belgrano* came on May 2 and was issued by the British War Cabinet. Soon after, *Conqueror* fired three Mark VIII torpedoes at three-second intervals, two hitting their target. Soon the *Belgrano* began to list to port and to sink towards the bow. Twenty minutes after the attack, at 1624hrs, Captain Hector Bonzo ordered the crew to abandon ship. Inflatable liferafts were deployed and the evacuation began. A total of 323 men lost their lives,many killed in the two initial explosions. At the time of the attack, there were 1,052 men on board.

Life on the line

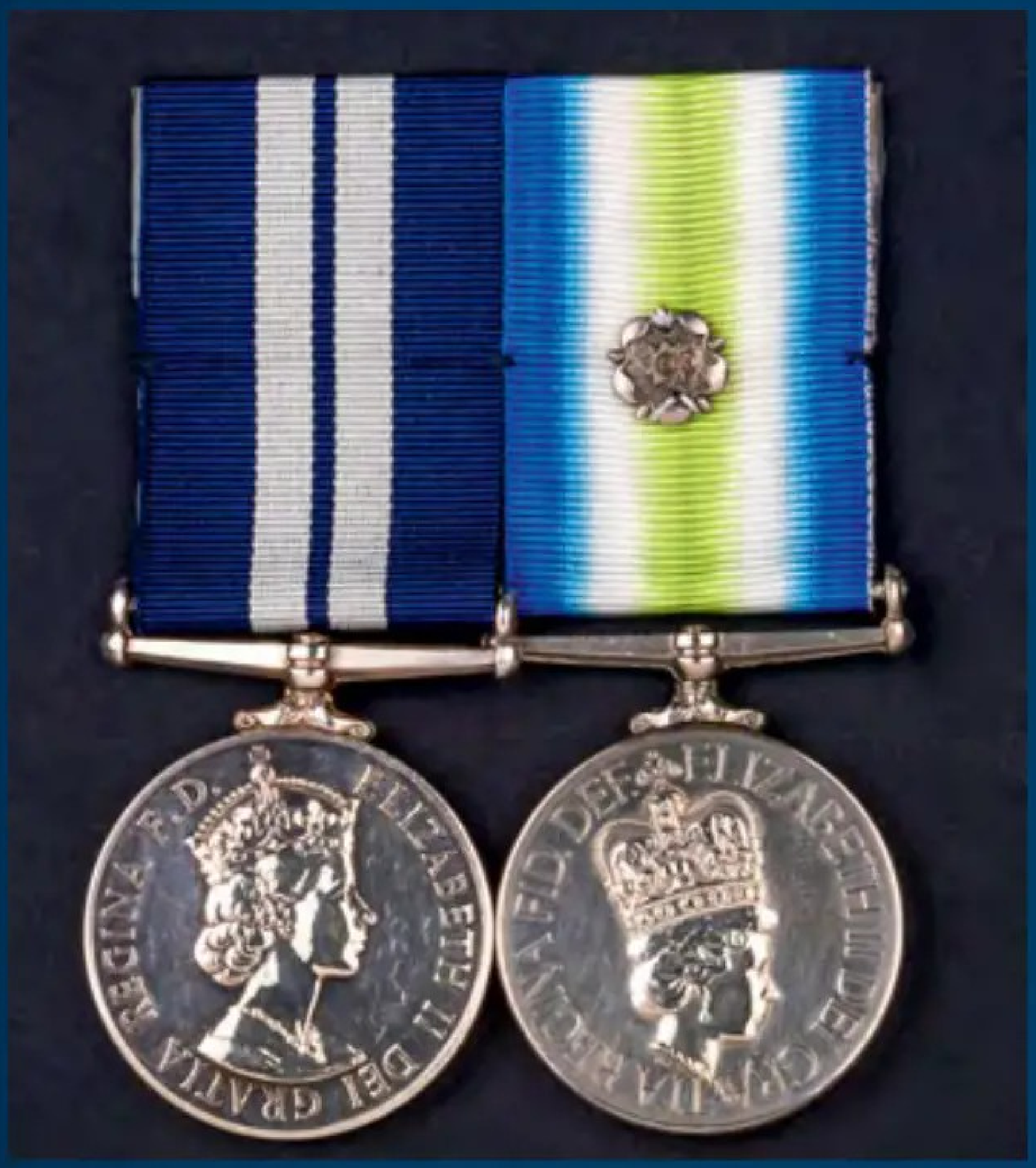
In the two days after the attack, *Conqueror* patrolled the area close by, becoming a target for the Argentine Air Force seeking revenge for the *Belgrano's* sinking. After one near miss from an enemy attack, *Conqueror* experienced a series of communication problems and, as part of an effort to repair the situation, an aerial wire was released into the water. However, this became tangled around the propeller, so rather than solve the problem, the wayward aerial had created another more serious one.

By May 25 and with the submarine patrolling north of the Falklands, there was only one thing for it: the submarine would have to surface – dangerous in itself with enemy aircraft in the area – and a

> *"I had only been home a few days when there was a knock on the door and there was this policeman stood there saying, 'You've been recalled. Make your way to the boat.' It was April 1, 1982, and I thought, this is a wind-up"*
>
> PETTY OFFICER GRAHAM LIBBY

HMS *Conqueror* returning home after the conflict, an achievement made possible by Libby's courage MIRRORPIX/ALAMY

Libby and two shipmates with *Conqueror's* Jolly Roger LORD ASHCROFT MEDAL COLLECTION



Libby's DSM and South Atlantic Medal. The rosette denotes combat service and was awarded for a minimum one day's service within 35° and 60° South latitude (or at least one operational sortie south of Ascension Island) between April 2 and June 14, 1982 LORD ASHCROFT MEDAL COLLECTION

diver, backed up by other crew, would be released into the water. His task was to investigate the problem and try to dislodge the wire.

The sea was both bitterly cold and rough and there was a real danger that the diver might be washed away. Even worse, if an enemy aircraft was sighted, the submarine would have to dive at once with the diver unable to get back aboard. The abandoned diver would have no chance of survival, either freezing to death or drowning as it would be hours before it was safe for the submarine to resurface.

Petty Officer Libby volunteered for the task of trying to resolve the submarine's problem, later recalling: "I was a single man, I was quite happy to go out there because I was all pumped up. We had just sunk a blooming great warship – this could be the icing on the cake, you know? It's just something exciting that I might never ever get a chance to do."

In his book *Secrets* of the *Conqueror*, Stuart Prebble takes up the story: "Libby and [First Lieutenant] Tim McClement climbed out onto the submarine casing, with five other divers for support and back-up. All of the men were attached to the boat by lifelines, but straight away a wave swept Libby and [Lieutenant] John Coulthard into the water."

Coulthard was pulled back to safety, but Libby disappeared from sight, rappearing at the stern of the boat. Prebble wrote: "Clanking around his body as he was buffeted by the waves was a range of tools and hacksaws that he thought he might need for the task. He found that the aerial

Commander Chris Wreford-Brown (left) and Petty Officer Libby in Portsmouth following the conflict PA/ALAMY

> *"If an enemy aircraft was sighted the submarine would have to dive at once with the diver unable to get back into the submarine. The abandoned diver would have no chance of survival"*

wire was indeed wrapped tightly around the shaft and blades. Worse still, even though the engines were of course stopped, the propellers were still turning gently and in danger of severing the diver's lifeline. Libby worked away with hacksaws, as speedily as he could, cutting off the wire in sections. The need for dexterity meant that he could not wear gloves, and gradually he felt his hands seize up and his entire body being penetrated by cold."

McClement was constantly scanning the horizon for any sign of enemy aircraft, knowing that there would be no way of getting Libby back if the submarine was forced to dive. After 20 minutes, and just when Libby's stamina was on the point of giving out, he declared the propeller clear and was hauled back inside. Wreford-Brown later said of the action: "I think Libby was outstandingly brave." This incident took place three weeks and two days after the sinking of the *Belgrano*.

Calculated courage

As *Conqueror* patrolled close to the Argentinian coast, the Royal Navy continued to suffer losses due to air attacks. However, slowly Britain gained the upper hand. With their forces weakened and demoralised, General Mario Menendez, the Argentine commanding officer in the Falklands, surrendered on June 14.

There were celebrations on board *Conqueror* and 24 hours later she was ordered home. She arrived at Faslane to a triumphant reception on July 13, proudly flying the white ensign and the Jolly Roger, embellished with her achievements, at the mast above the fin.

Libby's Distinguished Service Medal was announced in *The London Gazette* on October 11, 1982, when his citation concluded: "Acting Petty Officer (Sonar) (SM) Libby demonstrated a degree of cold, calculated courage and willingness to risk his life for the benefit of the ship far beyond any call of duty."

Commander Wreford-Brown was decorated with the Distinguished Service Order and two other members of the company were Mentioned in Despatches for their efforts to repair the radio mast.

Libby received his decoration in an investiture at Buckingham Palace on February 8, 1983. In an interview for my book *Falklands War Heroes*, he told me: "It was a brilliant day out. I received my medal from the Queen, and I remember she called me by my first name. She had been incredibly well briefed, because she knew I was on a course and she asked me how it was going. She had definitely done her homework and from what I could see she had no notes or prompts from a projector or anything else. She was very impressive – quite remarkable."

After leaving the Royal Navy in 1984, Libby worked for Hampshire Fire Brigade at their headquarters in Eastleigh. As part of his role in the fire service, Libby began to specialise in rescue techniques following natural disasters. He retired from the fire service in 2016, after 31 years' service. Today, Libby, who has three grown-up children and six grandchildren, lives in the Portsmouth area. Reflecting on the Falklands Conflict and the sinking of the *Belgrano*, he said: "I have no qualms about what we did. I think we did the right thing. We'd have lost quite a lot more lives on our side without it." BW

FALKLANDS WAR HEROES

Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is a businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. His book, *Falklands War Heroes*, was published in 2021. For more information, visit falklandswarheroes.com. For more information on Lord Ashcroft's work, visit lordashcroft.com. Visit his website about courage on: lordashcroftonbravery.com. Follow him on X and Facebook: @LordAshcroft

ROUGH RIDERS
PETER DOYLE
RELUCTANT PARTNER

Military History with Pete and Gary

No.43

Not so long ago, Gary visited The Brookwood Memorial. This commemorates those that served and died in World War Two who have no known grave and are not listed on another campaign memorial. However, it also mentions a number of serving personnel where their last resting place was very much known, because they had been convicted of a capital offence and executed!

Commonwealth War Graves Commission policy is quite clear in that they record even disgraced service personnel. One such man is Gunner Ernest Kemp who, at the age of 20, was convicted for the murder of Leading Aircraftwoman Iris (Miriam) Deeley of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force.

Deeley had spent the weekend of February 12/13, 1944, with her fiancé at her family's home in Wanstead, London. Unfortunately, she missed the last direct train from Charing Cross to Kidbrooke, near Greenwich, so telephoned RAF Kidbrooke – the stores base where she was stationed – to tell them she would be late returning and boarded a train to Lewisham to transfer there for Kidbrooke. Her body was found near to Well Hall Station, the stop after Kidbrooke, on February 14, 1944. She had been raped and strangled with her own scarf. Following police appeals, witnesses came forward to say Iris had been seen with a talkative soldier who appeared to be wearing an impressive collection of medals.

On the morning of February 22, 1944, Police Constable Charles Memory spotted a soldier with another WAAF. As Memory had served in World War One, he noticed that some of the medals worn by the soldier were issued before he could have been born – it later emerged that the man was born in 1923! Memory arrested the man and took him to Albany Road Police Station, near Regent's Park. The suspect stated that he was Gunner Ernest Kemp, a former railway porter who enlisted in the Queen's Royal Regiment (West Surreys) in December 1942. In 1943, Kemp transferred to the Royal Artillery, which brought him to Woolwich. On February 8, 1944, he absconded from his military escort while under arrest by climbing through a toilet window. During interviews, Kemp proved elusive in answering questions and was unable to explain why possessions belonging to Iris Deeley were found in his rucksack. His boot prints also matched those found close to her body.

On April 18, 1944, Kemp was tried for murder at the Old Bailey. Despite his innocent plea, the jury found him guilty of the murder of Iris Deeley with a recommendation to mercy. Regardless of this, Kemp was sentenced to death. He was duly executed by hanging on June 6, 1944, at Wandsworth Prison and was buried within the prison grounds. The army did not discharge him prior to execution, hence his name appears on panel two of The Brookwood Memorial. It is perhaps ironic that Kemp was executed just as the Allied forces were fighting their way across the D-Day beaches.

And what of Kemp's victim? Iris Deeley is buried in City of London Cemetery, Manor Park, London. Her death is also recorded by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Should you wish to learn more of the murderers commemorated at Brookwood and their victims, Gary found *The Brookwood Killers: Military Murderers of WWII* by Paul Johnson and published by Frontline Books invaluable when researching this article.

Peter Hart and Gary Bain's long running 'Pete and Gary's Military History' weekly podcast is available via podcast services. Follow Pete and Gary on X, formerly known as Twitter: @HartMilitary

Next Month

November 2025, issue 223

Inside Your Magazine

On sale October 30

In February 1944, Fleet Air Arm pilots who had scrambled to intercept a threat to a convoy got a shock when they encountered an unusual threat: the He 177 Grief. We chart the action as the naval aviators got to grips with Germany's flawed heavy bomber.

Canada sent a large contingent to the Korean War, but did you know that one man had a unique experience as the sole Royal Canadian Navy pilot to participate in the conflict? Moreover, the airman and future Olympian flew from a US flattop. Intrigued? We were!

As followers of The Tank Museum may know, there has been much change there recently, so we travelled to Dorset for an exclusive catch-up with Chris Copson and Chris Smith.

Cast your mind back to World War Two's Pacific campaign and you may envisage waves of LVTs crashing ashore on island beaches. LVTs were essential components to amphibious warfare, but few realise LVTs saw ample British service. We fill in that gap.

Finally, dare I whisper that Christmas will be here before you know it? No fear, we offer some assistance, as we announce *BAW's Books of the Year* and present our *Gift Guide*.

Plus

News, Lord Ashcroft's Hero of the Month, reviews and more

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